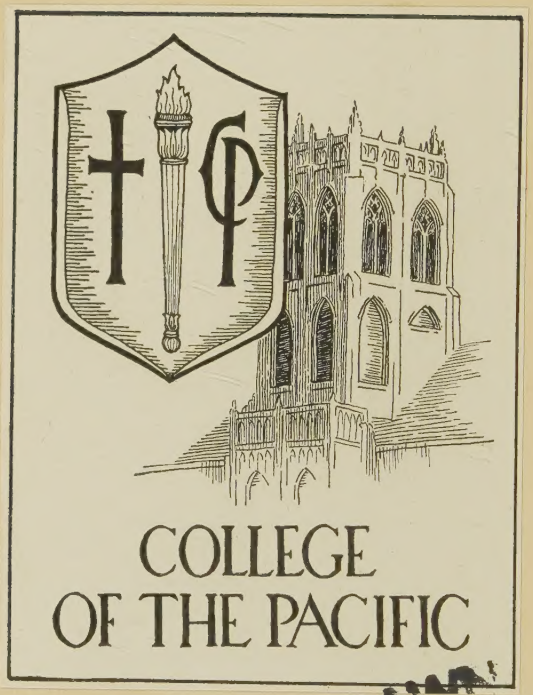

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DUMAS *FILS*, DRAMATIST

This thesis has been accepted by the Graduate School of New York University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

JOHN MUSSER

Secretary of the Faculty

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Stockton, Calif.

ALEXANDRE DUMAS, *fils*
DRAMATIST

By
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To my daughter
MARGARET LUISE SCHWARZ

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

IN 1868, the firm of Calmann-Lévy began publishing a complete edition of the dramatic works of Alexandre Dumas *fils* which finally developed into a series of seven volumes. After the dramatist's death, a new edition appeared in 1896; and an eighth volume, entitled *Notes inédites*, was added in 1898. In addition to these editions of the plays of Dumas *fils*, we have also two volumes bearing the title *Théâtre des Autres*, published by Calmann-Lévy in 1894, which contain plays written in collaboration. We use the word "collaboration" for want of a better term. Inasmuch as Dumas *fils* never collaborated except with the understanding that he might revise the play to suit his own tastes—and these revisions were very radical—these two volumes should be included in any study of Dumas *fils*. Subsequent editions of the *Théâtre des Autres* are identical with the original edition, except for the correction of obvious misprints; the same is true in the case of the *Théâtre Complet* since the edition of 1898. Because we are so fortunate as to have but one regular edition of the plays of Dumas *fils* in general use, the author of this work has deemed it advisable, in making citations, to indicate exactly where each reference may be found, so that any reader desirous of looking up a certain passage may have no difficulty in finding it. Thus, a quotation reading: *Préface, Ami des femmes, IV, p. 31*, indicates that the reference is taken from the fourth volume of the *Théâtre Complet* and is to be found on page 31. An extract from a play reading: *Ami des femmes, Act I, sc. 2, 60*, gives not only the act and scene in which the quotation may be located, but also the page on which it is to be found. It has at times been expedient, on account of limitations of space, to make omissions in quotations both from the prefaces and from the plays, but these omissions do not in any way affect the meaning or purport of the thought expressed. Such omissions have been indicated in the usual manner by the use of three periods.

It affords me great pleasure at this time to express my deep

appreciation to many colleagues and friends who, during the several years that this volume has been in preparation, have greatly aided me by helpful suggestions, by constant encouragement, and by kindly interest. Among them, I wish to make especial acknowledgment to Dean Earle B. Babcock, Assistant Dean James B. Munn, Prof. H. C. Heaton, Prof. Oliver Towles, and Prof. Frederick Ernst, of New York University; Prof. Louis Cons, of Princeton University; and Dr. Henry Powell Spring.

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H. S. S.

New York University,
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DUMAS *FILS*, DRAMATIST

INTRODUCTION

IT is a curious fact that as yet no one has devoted a volume of any considerable dimensions to a treatment of the dramatic works of Alexandre Dumas *fils*. During the year 1924, which marked the centenary of his birth, one might reasonably have expected due recognition to be paid to the memory of a dramatist who, in his own day, attracted the attention of the entire dramatic world. Posterity has been unkind indeed to Dumas *fils;* for a perusal of the French literary journals of the year 1924 shows us quite clearly that, although Dumas *fils* is not entirely forgotten, interest in him has waned lamentably.

Immediately after the death of Dumas *fils* in 1895, considerable speculation arose concerning the durability of his work. The leading critics of the time, men of the older generation, were rather convinced of its stability and of its perenniality. At that time Émile Faguet said of him: "The death of Alexandre Dumas *fils* is the greatest loss that French literature has suffered since the decease of Ernest Renan. Alexandre Dumas *fils* was a creator of men and a stimulator of ideas, a poet and a thinker. . . . He is among those who do not perish, or rather he is among those who rise again."[1] One year later, an attempt was made to establish a consensus of opinion concerning the much discussed writer, and a *questionnaire* was sent to more than eighty men of letters. Many of the younger writers refused to take the matter seriously, and sent in facetious and epigrammatic replies. It is more than possible that they, and still others, had hardly more than a passing acquaintance with the author or with the dramas which they were judging. The summarized verdict, according to Remy de Gourmont, was that Alexandre Dumas *fils* was neither a great writer, nor a great thinker, nor a great moralist. "For all that," states Professor Chandler, "brilliantly impassioned, and expert, he remains one of the master playwrights of the nineteenth century."[2]

An object of controversy during his lifetime, Dumas *fils* has

[1] Faguet: *Propos de théâtre*, IV, p. 48. [2] Chandler: *The Contemporary Drama of France*, p. 15.

remained an object of dispute even to the present day. Perhaps the fairest judgment of him is that written by René Doumic not long after the death of the dramatist: "When, for a period of forty years, the work of an author has not only stirred throngs of people and attracted the curious, but has also interested the most exacting, impassioned those most indifferent, given rise to interminable discussions, and carried its reverberations beyond the confines of the theater even into the customs and laws of the country, one hesitates to treat it as a negligible quantity. When one finds himself in the presence of an artist who respects his art, who is solicitous of exploring its entire domain, of augmenting its resources, of reconstructing its methods, who declares that he was never able to feel entirely satisfied, then at least one feels inclined to give him credit for his intentions and for his effort."[3]

Granted that judgments may vary concerning the literary value of the work of Dumas *fils*, even the most hostile critic cannot honestly gainsay the fact that his influence upon the drama of his day, and upon subsequent French drama, was inestimable. As Professor Smith wrote not more than a year ago: "More than any other French dramatist of the nineteenth century, Dumas *fils* was a creator. On most of the roads followed by the French prose drama for the past seventy years he was a pioneer; he even discovered a number of bypaths into which the theater has since been occasionally enticed. His restless and independent mind, his self-confidence, and his very lack of background and tradition made him a prolific initiator of new forms, and in most of these his undoubted dramatic gift scored a sensational success."[4] Dumas *fils* was a revolutionary who, in the nineteenth century, completely changed the course of the French theater much in the same way as Beaumarchais in the preceding century. Were this his only claim to fame, it would be worth while to devote a serious study to him; but this is by no means his only title to our consideration. "Dumas *fils* brought drama back to realities, recaptured it from imagination and impulse, restored it to its traditional French guardian, rationalism, and endowed it with serious thought and pur-

[3] Doumic: *Essais sur le théâtre contemporain*, p. 37.

[4] Hugh A. Smith: *Main Currents of Modern French Drama*, p. 130.

pose."[5] It will, we hope, become apparent, in the course of this study, that Dumas *fils* still ranks as a leading exponent of the realistic drama, as an earnest moralist, and as an important student of social questions.

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 149-150.

CHAPTER I

BIOGRAPHY: THE POSITION OF DUMAS *FILS* IN THE FRENCH DRAMA

Antoine-Alexandre Davy de la Pailleterie, *ancien commissaire d'artillerie*, paternal great-grandfather of Dumas *fils*, died at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, near Paris, in 1786. He had married a colonial negress, Marie Cessette, and their son, Alexandre Dumas, later became an army general in the district of Jérémie in the division of the island of Santo Domingo known as Haiti. He, in turn, had married Elisabeth Labouret, daughter of Claude Labouret, a hotel-keeper in Villers-Cotterets (Aisne). Of this latter union was born, in 1802, Alexandre Dumas-Davy de la Pailleterie, universally known as Alexandre Dumas, whose novelistic fertility enjoys an international reputation.

The son of the last-named, Alexandre Dumas the younger, known as Alexandre Dumas *fils* in literary circles in order to distinguish him from his father, made a humble entrance into the world. In 1823, Dumas *père*, a clerk at a yearly wage of 1200 francs, formed a *liaison* with a poor seamstress eight years his senior, Marie Catherine Lebay; and on July 27, 1824, their son was born. In his memoirs, Dumas *père* makes scant mention of this event: "On the 29th of July, 1824, while the duc de Montpensier was coming into the world at the Palais Royal, there was born to me a duc de Chartres at number 1, Place des Italiens." Dumas *père* even makes an error in the date of his son's birth!

Although Dumas *fils* rarely wrote about his early life, he frequently mentioned his reverence for his mother. "Fortunately for me," he tells us in the preface to *La Femme de Claude*, "my mother was a worthy woman who worked in order to bring me up." As we shall have occasion to notice later, he makes frequent reference in his plays to the divine quality of mother love; and it is quite probable that he had his own mother in mind as he traced the portrait of Clara Vignot in *Le Fils naturel*.

Fortunately, most of the weaknesses of Dumas *père* never de-

veloped in his son, when the latter reached maturity. One feature of atavism, however, manifests itself clearly in Dumas *fils:* that is his combativeness, which was to reveal itself not only in his boyhood struggles but in later life in his work and also in his own personality. In writing reminiscences of Dumas *fils* in 1895, shortly after the dramatist's death, Faguet thus described him: "In addition to that impassioned romantic, there was a polemicist, a combatant, a man firm in dispute and stubborn in attack, reply, and retort. You noticed this at first glance, for he possessed a soldier's stride, athletic shoulders, a military mustache, and a manner of tilting his head like a *conquistador.* Buffon had the appearance of a French marshal, Dumas *fils* that of a colonel of the First Empire."[1] Explaining how this pugnacity, evident in the personal appearance of Dumas *fils*, is apparent also in his plays, Faguet remarks, a few lines further on: "Dumas is a polemicist . . . he is so particularly in that, nine times out of ten, his play is a battle that he wages with his public and a challenge which he valiantly casts at it as on a tournament field." René Doumic had the same thing in mind when he wrote: "Let us add that M. Dumas loves a contest for the struggle itself. The most dangerous adventures are those which tempt him most. . . . There is something of the conqueror in that dramatic author, M. Dumas."[2]

Contemporaries of Dumas *fils* tell us how different and yet how similar were the father and son. Augustin Filon writes of him:

> I was in secondary school when, in 1860, I saw Augier and Dumas for the first time. . . . What struck me in Alexandre Dumas *fils* was to find him at the same time so different from his father, and yet so similar. How could that half-white negro, with his puffed and hanging jowls, have given being to that handsome gentleman in whom everything revealed the man beloved of women? And still there were the same features, more refined, cleaner cut, idealized. He would penetrate the person who was introduced to him with a quick and almost harsh glance, after which his face would expand or narrow, according to whether this newcomer had pleased him or not. For he was a man of instinctive and sudden judgment, both in his enthusiasms and in his repugnances, and his plays, as well as his prefaces, bear the imprint of that deep sensitiveness. When

[1] Faguet: *Propos de théâtre,* IV, pp. 54-55.

[2] Doumic: *Portraits d'écrivains,* pp. 14-15.

I met him again in the mountains of Auvergne, some fifteen years later, his curly hair had greyed, his complexion had become blotched, and his blue eyes expressed at times a haughty disdain, at times a calm pity. He was no longer the author of the *Demi-Monde*, but the author of *La Femme de Claude*.[3]

Anatole France likewise notes a difference between the father and the son, but from the viewpoint of the literary productions of each rather than from their personal appearance: "Dumas *père* was gay; he was kindly; he consoled men by telling them entertaining stories which never ended. His was an expansive and candid soul. But you have found a way to give your words a seriousness that his never had. He amused me and you have instructed me."[4]

In spite of these dissimilitudes, Dumas *père* was directly responsible for a great deal in the life and writings of his offspring. It was not until April 21, 1831, that he publicly recognized his son and made serious endeavors to contribute to his support. That Dumas *fils* was an illegitimate child is a matter of capital importance. Placed in the Pension Goubaux in 1831 for his early education, he there was forced to undergo the humiliations and tortures inflicted upon him by his unreasoning comrades. His early impression of life and of society was thus one of injustice and cruelty, and a desire to alter such conditions became almost an obsession with him. In a speech delivered on December 14, 1900, M. Tryon, president of the Société académique de la Loire-Inférieure, stated that in 1839 conditions in the Pension Goubaux had become so intolerable to Dumas *fils* that he was transferred to the Collège de Bourbon. Dumas *fils* himself, however, states in the preface to *La Femme de Claude* that, in that year, he was put into a small pension where he might find less antagonistic companions. Evidently his existence in this latter school was also turbulent; for he was again transferred, this time to the Collège Chaptal. He never succeeded in passing his baccalaureate.

At the age of seventeen, he went to live with his father. It is easy to conceive what must have been the environment of the young man when he became the comrade of Dumas *père*. His adolescent

[3] Filon: *De Dumas à Rostand*, pp. 12-13.

[4] Anatole France: *La Vie littéraire*, première série, p. 29.

vision was opened to a world of extravagant, reckless, and none too moral living. Many *liaisons* are to be counted in this bohemian life which he lived; but disgust, rather than pleasure, resulted from it. As we look at his plays, we thus see that his *Demi-Monde* is no mere fiction of the imagination. His conception of woman becomes, under these circumstances, immediately understandable.

In 1844, in the company of his father and several friends, Dumas *fils* travelled in Spain and in the Orient. The itinerary included many interesting cities, Madrid, Granada, Toledo, Seville, Algiers, and Contantinople. In 1847, having fallen in love with Mme de Nesselrode who was obliged to accompany her husband to Russia, Dumas followed the couple, but was forced to remain at the Polish frontier because his passport was not in order. For some time he waited for Mme de Nesselrode to return, as she had promised; but, upon her failure to keep her appointment, he returned to Paris and spent the following years in literary activities.

In 1859, Dumas *fils* met Mme Narischkine at Baden. A *liaison* ensued and a daughter, Colette, was born in 1860; soon, however, the mother returned to Russia and Dumas went back to Paris. In 1861, at the advice of his friend Henri Mirault, Dumas married Mme Narischkine; and several years later a second child, Jeannine, was born.

During the next five years, fatigued by his constant literary pursuits and in ill-health, Dumas wrote nothing. Returning to the theater in 1864 with *L'Ami des femmes*, he met with a great discouragement; for the play was poorly received, and there followed another period, this time of three years, in which his only literary production was the autobiographical novel *L'Affaire Clémenceau.* It was not until 1867, after the success of *Les Idées de madame Aubray*, that the author felt sufficiently recovered, both mentally and physically, to continue his literary activities on a large scale. In 1866 he had met, at the home of George Sand, the doctor Favre; and this acquaintanceship was to have a permanent influence upon him. Passing from positivism to an exalted mysticism, Dumas radically changed the atmosphere of his plays, couching them in an extravagant symbolism. Perhaps Dr. Favre is only one factor in this development of Dumas *fils*. It will be remem-

bered that the Franco-Prussian War broke out in 1870 and that, in the same year, Dumas lost his father for whom he always had a tender affection. It is possible that all of these factors, and not merely one of them, are responsible for the radical change which takes place in Dumas *fils* at this stage of his career.

On January 30, 1874, Dumas *fils* was elected to the French Academy, an honor which he highly esteemed. The other signal honor conferred upon him was that of the Legion of Honor in 1894. At this latter date, his health began to fail once more. The death of his wife in 1895 left him face to face with a lonely future. It was doubtless the prospect of feeble old age in solitude that prompted him to marry only a few months later, on June 26, 1895, Henriette Régnier, daughter of the celebrated comedian. The second marriage was, however, of short duration; for five months later, on November 27, 1895, Alexandre Dumas *fils* breathed his last.

As we have previously noted, Dumas *fils* was born in 1824, the year which marks the accession of Charles X. His career thus embraces the waning years of the Restoration, the Constitutional Monarchy, the Second Republic, the Second Empire, and twenty-four years of the Third Republic. We need not, then, be dismayed to find that our dramatist did not adopt and develop one definite, comfortable philosophy of life. The early years, naturally, were the most important for the formation of his character. The glories and traditions of the ancient nobility must have meant little to him, inasmuch as he was only six years of age when Charles X lost his throne. The supremacy of the bourgeoisie under the Constitutional Monarchy, however, is a significant factor in the life of Dumas *fils;* for this period covers, in his life, the time between his sixth and twenty-fourth year. He was himself a bourgeois, reared during a period of bourgeois ascendency. We are thus not surprised to find that his plays indicate a faith in the stability of the bourgeoisie, and that they contain scathing criticisms of the nobility. His bourgeois types are for the most part respectable. When he criticizes them, he attacks them for lack of honor in money matters, as in the case of Jean Giraud in *La Question d'argent;* but he never treats them as vicious. We shall see, later,

on the other hand, the depths of degradation of which Dumas *fils* believed the contemporary nobility to be capable.

In no century other than the nineteenth were literary "schools" so greatly in evidence in France. Did Dumas *fils* belong to any of them? He never would have admitted that he belonged to any definite school; for, as he himself declares, "in art and particularly in literature there are no schools, there are no *genres*, there are no forms, there are no truths; there is only the test of durability."[5] Nor would he have granted that he was the initiator of a new movement: "I have neither the chimerical hope nor the foolish pride to expect to change anything whatsoever in the things which surround me. . . . One must possess an egoism bordering on hemiplegia or delirium tremens to imagine that one is making a revolution in literature or that one is the head of a school."[6] We might expect that Dumas *fils*, who passed his youth in the full sway of the romantic period, might himself be imbued with romanticism. He had, in 1845, at the age of twenty-one, written an inconsequential one-act comedy, *Le Bijou de la Reine*, which was acted but once, at the Hôtel Castellane, and never appeared in printed form until it was later published with his complete plays. In many respects, it bears the imprint of romanticism: it is written in verse; and, furthermore, the scene is laid in Spain in 1708. It is likewise interesting to note a fact not very generally known, that the first published work of Dumas *fils* was a volume of verse, *Péchés de Jeunesse*, published by Fellens and Dufour in 1847. The edition was never reprinted and copies of the volume have become rare. Thus, from his earliest literary endeavors, Dumas *fils* gave every indication of following in the well-trodden paths of the Romanticists. But here again the disparity of temperament between Alexandre Dumas *père* and Alexandre Dumas *fils* finds a counterpart in the literary production of each; for, in the same full-hearted manner in which the father embraced romanticism, the son ardently adopted realism as his field. There are doubtless several reasons that contributed to the adoption of this course of action. Dumas *fils* made his début into literature at a moment

[5] *Préface, Étrangère*, VI, p. 214. [6] *Ibid.*, pp. 213-214.

when romanticism was already decidedly on the wane and literary currents were turning in the direction of realism. Honoré de Balzac, it will be remembered, had written the first novel of his extensive *Comédie humaine* as early as 1829; and the year 1850 marks the end of his energetic career. Perhaps Dumas' lack of intimacy with nature, so cherished by the romantic poets, is also a factor which induced the logically-minded dramatist to seek a new form of literary expression. "It is not that I am an admirer of nature for herself," he tells us; "I do not fall down in ecstasy before her, I confess. On the contrary, nature saddens me, agitates me; solitude worries me, the infinite troubles me."[7] As we might expect from this statement, nature is practically absent from the plays of Dumas *fils*.

One cannot, however, break immediately and completely with one's past. In spite of its realistic method of treatment, his first play, *La Dame aux camélias*, is impregnated with romanticism; and his second work, *Diane de Lys*, also evinces very definite traces thereof. These, however, disappear in the remaining plays, to the great regret of the critic J.-J. Weiss who never forgave Dumas' abjuration of romanticism. When we say that these traces of romanticism disappear, we must, at the same time, note that they make sporadic and intermittent reappearances at most unexpected moments. In *La Femme de Claude*, for example, the soliloquy of Claude beginning: "Quelle belle soirée, claire et calme! Quel silence! Quelle grandeur! Quelle harmonie!" is distinctly Hugolian in conception. The disturbing solitude of nature is reflected in the words of Olivier de Jalin in *Le Demi-Monde:*

> L'automne dernier. . . . Tiens, voilà une saison dangereuse, à la campagne surtout, où la solitude donne carrière à l'imagination, où chaque feuille qui tombe est une élégie toute faite, où l'on sent le besoin de devenir poitrinaire pour être dans le ton de la nature mélancolique et décolorée.[8]

In *Les Idées de madame Aubray*, Camille characterizes his adoration of poetry as follows:

> Je fais courir sous cette musique parlée une mélodie de Mozart, de

[7] *A Charles Marchal*, II, p. 210. [8] Act I, sc. 3, 43-44.

Beethoven ou de Rossini, et je mêle ensemble les deux inspirations; ou bien, je pars à l'aventure, et, à travers la campagne, sur les plateaux des falaises, tout seul, je jette dans le bourdonnement des insectes, dans le murmure lointain des flots, dans ces mille bruits qui composent le silence de la nature, je jette au hasard les vers des poètes qui répondent le mieux à mes sensations présentes que je suis incapable de traduire moi-même. Je m'écoute, je m'excite, je m'enivre jusqu'à ce que, le visage baigné de larmes, je ne puisse plus faire un pas, ni articuler un mot.[9]

These quotations give ample proof that Dumas *fils* was not lacking in æsthetic sense. He was, nevertheless, a very practical man in search of truth; and, at the outset of his career, decided upon prose as his medium of expression. As he himself states: "I said to myself with a certain amount of good sense: 'You will have to content yourself with prose. It alone can express what you have to say. It is now better suited than rhyme to the manners, the passions, the mentality, and the dress of your time. . . . It is as naked as truth, and you immediately know on what to rely by using it.' "[10]

Dumas' conception of nature was not the nature of mountains and lakes, of field and stream, but human nature; and it is this Molièresque attitude that he considered best befitting dramatic literature: "All literatures, including dramatic literature, have always had for their prime basis, if not for their ultimate end, the most faithful possible investigation and representation of nature, with a philosophical conclusion deduced from this study and representation."[11] Renouncing romanticism and its methods of expression, Dumas decided "to remain his own master and never write anything that he did not believe to be the absolute truth."[12] That he rapidly adopted the tenets of the realistic school is apparent from his declaration: "Now my methods in matters of the theater were, and are, the following: I write my play as if the characters were alive, and I give them the language of familiar life. Or, to put it into other terms, I mould in plastic clay, and I thus obtain backgrounds of great strength and points of emphasis of great vigor."[13] He likewise states: "I have said nothing about invention, for the

[9] Act III, sc. 1, 293.
[10] *A Henri Lavoix*, I, p. 393.
[11] *Préface, Étrangère*, VI, p. 173.
[12] *A M. Cuvillier-Fleury*, V, p. 184.
[13] *Avant-Propos, Demi-Monde*, II, p. 18.

excellent reason that invention does not exist for us. We have nothing to invent; we have only to see, to remember, to feel, to coördinate, and to reëstablish, under a special form, that which all spectators must immediately remember having felt or seen without having up to that time been able to take notice of it."[14]

Realism is, nevertheless, a broad term; and although critics have with marked uniformity referred to Dumas *fils* as a realist, they have rightly qualified this classification with certain reservations. Hippolyte Parigot remarks that Dumas *fils* "who is, *in the general sense of the word*, the most realistic of contemporary dramatists, never believed that realism was an end, but considered it as a means."[15] René Doumic, who states in his *Essais sur le théâtre contemporain* that "it was Dumas *fils* who formerly transported realism suddenly to the French stage," makes, in a different volume, the following reservations concerning the dramatist's realism:

> That is to say that Dumas is not, properly speaking, what we call a realist. Whereas the realist is intent upon reproducing what is most ordinary and most common in life, M. Dumas studies only *exceptional cases*, persuaded that the exception alone is interesting. Whereas the realist has as a constant preoccupation self-effacement, allowing events to combine of their own accord, and not interfering in any way with their natural action, M. Dumas arranges the facts. . . . The realist borrows his types from average humanity: M. Dumas demands the right to place before us characters that are greater than nature.[16]

Although the preceding criticisms are entirely justified, it must be observed that M. Doumic is giving to the term 'realism' a very strict limitation. This interpretation of realism as a vehicle which depicts *average humanity* had already been developed by Émile Faguet in the study of Lesage contained in his *Dix-huitième Siècle: Études littéraires*. Few critics, nevertheless, have been willing to interpret realism in so restricted a sense. This narrow definition would immediately exclude from the realistic group Honoré de Balzac, who once said to George Sand: "I like exceptional people also; I am an exceptional person myself. Furthermore, I need them to make my common characters stand out. . . . But these

[14] *Préface, Père prodigue*, III, p. 211.
[15] Parigot: *Le Théâtre d'hier*, p. 147.
[16] Doumic: *Portraits d'écrivains*, pp. 48-49.

common characters interest me more than they interest you. I enlarge them, I idealize them in inverse proportion, in their ugliness or in their stupidity. I give frightful or grotesque proportions to their difformities."[17]

It was doubtless Dumas' broad interpretation of realism that caused him, during the latter part of his dramatic career, to fail to heed the call of the naturalistic school which, in the case of the novel, was winning over so many of the realists, and which was also rapidly gaining converts in the drama. Dumas *fils* found that the practises of this school could not very well be adapted to the theater without shocking the audience. "The book is not the stage," he tells us. "Methods of communication, optical effects, and sound production are not the same. The book may readily say anything which might be mentioned in the theater. The stage, however, will never be able to discuss matters as freely as may the book for the very reason that three people cannot always mention and do what they would say and do if the number were limited to two. The book speaks in low tones, in a corner, with door and windows closed, to one single person; it emanates from the alcove and from the confessional. On the other hand, the theater speaks to twelve or fifteen hundred persons in a group and emanates from the public platform and the public square. The painting of truth in public therefore has its limits."[18] "You would like to have the dramatist say upon the stage what he would say in real life? Just try it."[19] "Not only are there words which the spectator does not wish to hear, but there are also situations which he refuses to admit."[20] Frankness is one of the virtues of Dumas *fils;* but, unlike the naturalists, he does not carry it to excess. The extravagances or indecency of a Zola, however characteristic of real life they may be, find no place in the works of Dumas. He treats a delicate subject with suggestion rather than with bald statement, despite the fact that he is no prude:

Le Comte: Nous voyageons en poste! Pourquoi ces prodigalités?
André: A cause de ma femme!

[17] G. Sand: *Histoire de ma vie,* IV, chap. xv.
[18] *Préface, Étrangère,* VI, p. 176.
[19] *Ibid.,* p. 182.
[20] *Ibid.,* p. 185.

LE COMTE, *joyeux:* Est-ce que? . . .
ANDRÉ: Oui.
LE COMTE: Reçois mes compliments, mon ami![21]

ALVAREZ: Qu'est-ce qu'elle a fait, ta maman, hier au soir?
JEANNE: Elle est restée ici avec papa.
ALVAREZ: Il n'est venu personne les voir?
JEANNE: Si, madame de Talveyra est venue.
ALVAREZ: A quelle heure est-elle partie?
JEANNE: Je ne sais pas, on m'a couchée à neuf heures.[22]

Dumas *fils* believed that the dramatist who refuses to carry his realism to its full limit is none the less an artist. The artist must do more than give an exact reproduction of things as they are: "The artist, the true artist, has a higher and more difficult mission than that of reproducing that which exists; he has to discover and to reveal to us what we do not see in all that which we observe about us every day."[23] In other words, the true artist must idealize the real: "The artist does not truly deserve that name unless he give a soul to material things, a form to the things of the soul, unless, in a word, he idealizes the real and attains the ideal which he feels."[24]

It is quite evident that the critics whom we cited a moment ago, whether they have a broad or a narrow interpretation of realism, are not concerned with the purpose of Dumas *fils*. Granted that realism was his goal, they are interested merely in whether or not he completely attained his objective. As we read through the many articles written upon the subject, we notice that the entire question centers upon the human aspect of the characters of Dumas' plays. Fortunat Strowski holds that Dumas *fils* did not succeed in creating living characters;[25] and René Doumic sums up the case as follows: "What characterizes them is precisely the absence of any individuality. They do not possess any of the signs by which life is recognized. They are walking arguments. . . . Since they have become the mouthpieces of the author, the characters of M. Dumas

[21] *Père prodigue*, final scene, 413.
[22] *Supplice d'une femme*, Act I, sc. 6, 52-53.
[23] *Préface*, *Étrangère*, VI, p. 178.
[24] *Ibid.*
[25] Strowski: *Tableau de la littérature française au XIX^e siècle*, p. 344: "He was almost entirely devoid of the gift of creating living characters that have a living personality, a destiny, and a soul; his characters are abstract beings, and, like abstractions, they are logical and brutal."

have become neither less curious, nor less amusing, nor less touching: they have merely ceased to be alive."[26] It is unfortunately true, particularly in the thesis-plays, that the characters of Dumas *fils* are walking arguments, manikins manipulated by the clever fingers of the author; but it is manifestly unjust to state that his characters lack any individuality. Jean Giraud, in *La Question d'argent*, for example, is an excellent rendition of a particular type of *parvenu*. What he lacks is certainly not individuality, but greater depth, to make him at the same time individualistic and yet a universal type. The speeches of de Ryons, in *L'Ami des femmes*, are essentially in tune with his nature, as Paul Bourget has indicated.[27] Paul Aubry, in *Diane de Lys*, talks like an artist:

> Paul: This existence appears to you, madame, under the caressing and gilded tints of distant horizons, like those dense forests which cut off our view under a splendid summer sun; they seem smooth as velvet, yielding as moss, yet those who are forced to traverse them lacerate their hands, feet, and faces, without enjoying for a single moment the distant spectacle. Our artist life has many discomfitures, many sadnesses, many discouragements. Oh! believe me, madame, for you, young and beautiful, the true life is your own.[28]

However zealous we may be in defending the success of Dumas *fils* in differentiating his characters, or in rendering these characters true to themselves, we must agree with Sarcey that Dumas has created no great lasting character, true of all ages: "Excepting de Ryons, that type dear to Dumas, whom he marks with precise, accurate strokes for the excellent reason that he was himself his own model, I do not see that he has created, like Molière or Shakespeare, living characters whose names traverse the ages. Everyone recognizes Desdemona, Othello, and Tartuffe. . . . Dumas, who took such a solicitous interest in women and their destiny, has not succeeded in instilling real life in any one of those whom he has put upon the stage."[29] Sarcey has here indicated the great lacuna

[26] Doumic: *Essais sur le théâtre contemporain*, pp. 13, 15.

[27] Bourget: *Nouveaux essais de psychologie contemporaine*, p. 48: "And note well that these words, pronounced by de Ryons, spring from the very entrails of his character. He produces these words and the theories which they represent by all the logic of his personality. . . . No, his intelligence is entirely his own and is in conformity with his whole nature."

[28] *Diane de Lys*, Act II, sc. 9, 277.

[29] Sarcey: *Quarante ans de théâtre*, V, p. 178.

in the realism of Dumas *fils*. Realists of genius have succeeded in modeling characters of distinct individuality and also in making them so universally recognizable that they have lived throughout succeeding generations. Alceste, Gil Blas, and Père Goriot are highly realistic types, as true to life to-day in the United States of America as they were in France in their respective centuries. Some realists have chosen characters which former writers have already treated; but they have made these characters, universal types though they may be, so individualistic by additional points of accentuation, that they stand out in clear relief. No one would mistake Père Grandet for Harpagon, yet both are admirable reproductions of the miser. In the case of Dumas *fils*, we must admit that neither has he created any new character of great universal durability, nor has he succeeded in developing a character used by a former writer so as to make of him a distinct, lasting personality.

Before leaving the subject of the position of Dumas *fils* in the history of the French drama, let us recapitulate, in a few words, our preceding investigations. We have seen that the dramatist was born in the heyday of romanticism. Although he refused to ally himself with any definite school, he soon observed that the field in which he desired to work was that of realism. According to the elasticity of their conception of realism, various critics have indicated limitations to the success which the author achieved in attaining his ends, revealing the fact that the largest gap in the realism of Dumas *fils* has been his failure to create distinctive, eternal characters. The dramatist himself realized the limitations of realism interpreted in its strict sense, indicated the difference between novelistic conversation and dramatic dialogue, and interpreted dramatic art as an idealization of the real. If, therefore, we use the word 'realist' in its broader sense, we may give Dumas *fils* a place among the realists of the nineteenth century; for his work bears the imprint of most of the characteristics which we customarily attribute to that school. Dumas *fils* was a realist of talent, but not a realist of genius.

CHAPTER II

THE INFLUENCE OF OTHER FRENCH WRITERS UPON DUMAS *FILS*

CRITICS and historians of French literature seem to have so focussed their attention upon Balzac and Scribe, as the main sources of the work of Dumas *fils*, that they have failed, in most cases, to look back further than the nineteenth century. Yet, in reading the plays of Dumas, we find striking similarities between his method of workmanship and that of Corneille;[1] and there are also occasional similarities in ideas, although the latter may be accidental.

Corneille's *Horace* and Dumas' *La Princesse Georges* offer interesting analogies in workmanship. In the former play, the murder of Camille by Horace marks a tremendous dramatic crisis. That this crisis is methodically motivated is evident to one who analyzes the preceding scenes. Let us turn to the sixth scene of the third act of *Horace*. In this entire scene, the only utterance of Camille is "O mes frères!" when she hears of the death of her brothers; and she is immediately reprimanded by her father who, calling his sons traitors, is unwilling to have her weep for them. From this moment, her torment begins. In the first scene of the fourth act, Camille bids her father give up his attitude of heartless patriotism. This is followed by a scene in which Valère, the rival of Curiace for the hand of Camille, announces the result of the battle involving the defeat of Curiace. Camille interprets Valère's attitude as one of exultation. Her only utterance in the entire scene is "Hélas!" In the third scene, her father continues to refuse Camille any sympathy and bids her cease her weeping. The fourth scene contains the famous monologue in which Camille reviews all of her sufferings and the desperateness of her situation. In the fifth scene,

[1] Parigot is the only writer who stresses the influence of the technique of Corneille upon Dumas *fils*. In his *Théâtre d'hier*, p. 126, he states: "We must go back as far as Corneille to find at its origin that knowledge of stage-craft, that taste for composition, unity, and strength, that bitterness of logic, of unconquerable logic, that need of inexorable progression, that imperious sympathy for characters sharply outlined and for rectilinear passions."

unable to contain her feelings any longer, she curses Rome and Horace kills her. Prior to the sixth scene of the third act, Camille would not have anathematized Rome, nor would Horace have been in a mood to kill her even if she had done so. Corneille carefully motivated his crisis by a series of scenes leading to a culmination of emotion.

Now let us turn to *La Princesse Georges* of Dumas *fils*. A rapid analysis of events will serve to show how Dumas handles his plot to produce a similar emotional crisis.

ACT I

Scene 1. Séverine, wife of the prince de Birac, learns through her servant Rosalie that Sylvanie, comtesse de Terremonde, is her husband's mistress. *Scene 2.* Séverine reveals this fact to her mother, who gives her little sympathy. *Scenes 3 & 4.* Galanson, a lawyer, consults Séverine to learn whether she wishes to allow her husband to have control of her fortune. *Scene 5.* The prince is in immediate need of two million francs, and asks Galanson for them. *Scenes 6 & 7.* The prince discovers that Rosalie has revealed to Séverine the secret of his liaison with Sylvanie. *Scene 8.* The prince convinces Séverine of his innocence and she falls into his arms, grateful for his love. *Scene 9.* Alone, Séverine realizes that the prince has lied and as the curtain descends she exclaims: "Oh! je suis une lâche et une malheureuse!"

ACT II

Scene 1. Valentine, friend of Séverine, bursts forth in invectives against Sylvanie and her kind and criticizes her social circle for harboring the countess. *Scene 2.* The full evidence of the complicity of the prince and Sylvanie is revealed. *Scene 3.* Séverine publicly denounces Sylvanie and orders her from the house. *Scene 4.* Séverine tells Agénor, Sylvanie's husband, that the countess has a lover, but refuses to reveal his name.

ACT III

Scene 1. In the presence of her mother, who still is entirely unsympathetic, Séverine asks her lawyer Galanson what aid the law will afford her. He acknowledges that the law is powerless to help her.

At this point, Séverine bursts forth in the following emotional scene:

SÉVERINE: Well, what do I care for the pity of happy people! Then that is all that both of you can do for me, you, the law, and you, my own family? The law can give me back the money of my dowry if the

law can find it again. My family can give me back my room in a boarding-school and that is all. Always material life, board and lodging, such is the care of society! And suppose that I can no longer eat; and suppose that I cannot sleep; what will society do for my heart which it will have permitted to break, for my soul which it will have allowed to be bruised? My soul, what is my soul? And yet I have one, for I feel it. That is none of your concern, stifle it! But the meanest of animals lives her full life, has her young, brings them into the world, nourishes them, protects them, loves them. And you, creature of God, for whom a God died, you will not even have what nature has given to animals. At twenty years of age you will no longer be a woman, you will not even be a female! (*She strikes her breast.*) Come now! Who is permitted to say that? Ah! so thus it is! Each one for himself? Very well, since you have not found the way of granting me my liberty I shall find it myself. I am no longer the slave of that man, I am no longer his victim, I am his judge.[2]

The similarity of workmanship of Dumas *fils* and Corneille, through the gradual accumulation of misfortunes working toward a climax, is most striking.[3] These misfortunes are visited upon both Camille and Séverine by denial of love and lack of parental sympathy. The action of both plays culminates in a scene in which the victim reviews the calamities which have befallen her; and, in both cases, the victim is innocent of wrong-doing. The technical similarity consists partly in the cumulative use of anticipation or what the French call "seeds" (*semences*) of the action, partly in the strong progressive linking of successive scenes. It is entirely possible that the parallelism is accidental, Dumas being instinctively a good dramatist; but the circumstances producing the crises in the two plays have sufficient similarity to lead one to believe that Dumas *fils* had studied carefully Corneille's method and subject-matter.

This belief is strengthened by other evidences of similarity in the plays of Corneille and those of Dumas *fils*. We find an example in *Le Filleul de Pompignac*. On her death-bed, Madame Dornan has confessed to her husband that her son Paul is not his child, but the son of another man whose name she will not reveal. This revelation has made an embittered man of Dornan. Years later,

[2] *Princesse Georges*, Act III, sc. 1, 152.

[3] A similar building up of an emotional crisis occurs in Corneille's *Polyeucte*, Act V, sc. 5, when Pauline, enumerating her sufferings, denounces her father for causing the martyrdom of Polyeucte.

in a conversation with the général de Fronteville, Dornan discovers by the general's attitude as he listens to Dornan's story of his saddened life, that the general is the father of Paul, and he promptly challenges him to a duel. Events in the play have made the outcome of this duel of vital interest to many of the characters; and, at the beginning of the fourth act, we have an analysis of the emotions of each of these. The manner of treatment is highly reminiscent of the method employed by Corneille in many of his better plays.

Occasionally we find in a play of Dumas *fils* a sentence that reminds us strongly of Corneille. One of the most striking of these is: ". . . l'ordre de substituer ma justice à votre justice suprême et d'armer ma main de votre glaive redoubtable."[4] This sentence, it is true, is reminiscent of Corneille merely through its sound and general suggestion. On the other hand, we sometimes find an exact parallelism of idea. Compare, for example, the line: "Tous les moyens sont bons à celui qui aime"[5] with the advice which Euphorbe gives Maxime when the latter betrays Cinna:

> . . . L'amour rend tout permis;
> Un véritable amant ne connoît point d'amis.[6]

The tendency of Dumas to make his characters utter lengthy soliloquies has already been suggested in the citation of the long soliloquy of Séverine in *La Princesse Georges*. If the reader will turn to the first scene of the third act of *La Femme de Claude*, he will find that the lines of Claude, beginning "Quelle belle soirée, claire et calme! Quel silence! Quelle grandeur! Quelle harmonie!" introduce a soliloquy which reminds us at once of Corneille in that it contains all of the pent-up feelings of a character expressed immediately before a tragic action ensues.

Passing from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century, we find that here also are influences which later produce very discernible effects upon the nineteenth-century French theater in general, and upon Dumas *fils* in particular. Diderot suggested concentration of the drama upon daily life rather than upon characterization of certain types:

[4] *Femme de Claude*, Act III, sc. 1, 307. 67.
[5] *Supplice d'une femme*, Act I, sc. 11, [6] *Cinna*, Act III, sc. 1, lines 735-736.

DORVAL: Man's social status must to-day become the principal object, and the character must be only an accessory.

MYSELF: Then you would like us to play upon the stage the man of letters, the philosopher, the business-man, the judge, the lawyer, the politician, the citizen, the magistrate, the financier, the great lord, the supervisor of property?

DORVAL: Add to that all relations: the father of a family, the husband, the sister, the brothers.[7]

He had also visualized a type of play which would be instructive, not, as in the case of Molière, merely through its amusing qualities, but by its direct predication: "At times I have thought that one might discuss on the stage the most important points of *morale*, and without harming the violent and dramatic progress of the action. . . . Thus a poet might agitate the question of suicide, of honor, of duelling, of fortune, of dignities, and a hundred other questions."[8] Is not this precisely the programme of Dumas *fils*?

But Diderot was hardly more than a theoretician in questions of the drama. His own plays, *Le Père de famille*, played in 1761, and *Le Fils naturel*, played in 1771, were complete failures. Beaumarchais, however, was a practical dramatist who wrote plays which were successful in their day and which have been considered by posterity to be works of literary excellence. Jules Guillemot, whose volume entitled *L'Évolution de l'idée dramatique chez les maîtres du théâtre de Corneille à Dumas fils* is worthy of the attention of every student of the French drama, claims quite justly that Dumas *fils* is the descendant and heir of Beaumarchais:

> Arriving at Dumas *fils* I meet the most fecund author in technical explanations that the dramatic art of the nineteenth century has known. As I have already remarked, this writer is the true intellectual son of Beaumarchais: he is his heir and continuator much more than he is the heir and continuator of Dumas *père*. We find in both of them the same militant disposition, the same feverish, polemical tendency, together with a dazzling, incomparable wit which they each distribute profusively, at times even excessively. It is this polemical spirit, this need of defending their ideas and their works, that urge these two authors to write prefaces, postfaces, notices, and notes of every description, in order to justify both their ideas and their works.[9]

[7] *Dorval et Moi*, 3e entretien.
[8] Diderot: *De la poésie dramatique*.
[9] Guillemot: *L'Évolution de l'idée dramatique*, p. 226.

Both Beaumarchais and Dumas *fils* were revolutionists; both were imbued with a philosophical spirit; both were endowed with indomitable energy and perseverance; both were possessed of clarity of expression rendered forceful by penetrating logic; both firmly believed in the social drama and utilized their works for the support and promulgation of social ideas. How heartily Dumas *fils* would have endorsed the conception of the social drama as expressed by Beaumarchais in his preface to *Le Mariage de Figaro:* "Vices, abuses, that is what does not change, but disguises itself in a thousand forms, under the mask of the dominant manners of the day. To tear off this mask and show them uncovered, such is the noble task of the man who devotes himself to the theater. Whether he moralizes with a smile, or weeps as he moralizes, be he Heraclitus or Democritus, he has no other duty; woe unto him if he departs therefrom! You can correct men only in making them see themselves as they really are."

We shall, perchance, be deemed temerarious if we compare the style of Dumas *fils* with that of Beaumarchais; for the former admittedly falls far short of the latter. Yet there is one point in common which cannot be passed unnoticed. Both Beaumarchais and Dumas *fils* adopted in many places a choppy style which, with its unfinished ideas, gives a lightness of touch and a rapidity of action which is delightful either to the auditor or the reader. In *Le Mariage de Figaro,* we find in the very first scene the following lines:

FIGARO, *se frottant le front:* Ma tête s'amollit de surprise; et mon front fertilisé. . . .
SUZANNE: Ne le frotte donc pas!
FIGARO: Quel danger? . . .
SUZANNE, *riant:* S'il y venait un petit bouton! Des gens superstitieux. . . .

Compare the above citation with the following lines, selected from the eighth scene of the first act of *La Princesse Georges:*

LE PRINCE: Alors elle a exigé cette dernière preuve. . . .
SÉVERINE: D'amour?
LE PRINCE: De déférence. Et comme je voulais rentrer en possession de mes lettres . . . à cause de toi . . . j'y suis allé.

SÉVERINE: Alors maintenant? . . .
LE PRINCE: Je suis libre? Il y a de ces chaînes-là dans la vie des hommes. Je pourrais te citer dix de mes amis, et la délicatesse exige . . .
SÉVERINE: Alors nous pouvons partir.
LE PRINCE: Quand tu voudras.

Arriving at the nineteenth century, we discover that Dumas *fils* was indebted also to his contemporaries. Although he soon broke away from the traditions of the romantic school, he could not wean himself entirely from its influence. We have already noticed that manifest traces of romanticism occur in his work, particularly in the first two plays. In *La Dame aux camélias* and also in *Les Idées de madame Aubray*, rehabilitation of the humble and fallen creature brings to mind rather obviously the Victor Hugo of *Le dernier jour d'un condamné* and of *Les Misérables*.

That Dumas is indebted slightly to Victorien Sardou is also not unlikely. Sardou's *Pattes de mouche* appeared in 1860; Dumas produced his *Ami des femmes* in 1864. As we compare the plays, we discover that the Prosper of Sardou and the de Ryons of Dumas have much in common:

DE RYONS: I am a man who, having nothing to do, has begun to study women, just as another person might study coleoptera or minerals. But I think that my study is more interesting and more useful than that of the other person, since we meet woman at every step.[10]

SUZANNE: . . . And come now, Sir Traveller, what is the most curious thing that you have found in the world?
PROSPER: The most curious? Why, women!
SUZANNE: Oh! then you are making a study of the species?
PROSPER: Exclusively, mademoiselle, just as Thirion studies insects and others study mushrooms![11]

The similarity between these passages may be accidental, merely representing the typical social cynicism of the Second Empire. There is, however, a further parallelism: a wager plays an important part in each play:

DE RYONS: Then it was not you.
JANE: You know very well that it was not I.

[10] *Ami des femmes*, Act I, sc. 5, 72. [11] *Pattes de mouche*, Act I, sc. 13.

De Ryons: Let us wager that within two days you will tell me the contrary.

Jane: Within two days I shall tell you that the woman in the railroad train was I?

De Ryons: You will be compelled to, and without my asking you.

Jane: I should certainly be curious to see that.

De Ryons: You will see it.[12]

Suzanne: Come now, be nice and give it back to me. . . .
Prosper: Give back what?
Suzanne: The letter!
Prosper: My antidote! . . . no!
Suzanne: I shall make you give it up by force!
Prosper: Let us wager that you will not.
Suzanne: Let us wager that I shall!
Prosper: Is this a declaration of war?
Suzanne: Yes, to the finish![13]

The more immediate sources of the drama of Alexandre Dumas *fils* are to be found, as many critics have indicated, in the works of Scribe, the dramatist, and of Balzac, the novelist. Were it not for the fact that literary criticism does not lend itself to mathematical calculation, one might be tempted to say that Scribe plus Balzac equals Dumas *fils*. From Scribe, he inherited the technique of the stage; from Balzac, the study of mankind in contemporary society. Doubtless, Dumas was not unmindful of the duality of his heritage when he wrote: "And the conclusion? The conclusion is that the dramatic author who would know man like Balzac and the theater like Scribe would be the greatest author that ever lived."[14]

Scribe (1791-1861) was a craftsman well versed in all the tricks which the dramatist uses to develop and sustain the interest of the audience. Standing aloof from any particular school, he sought little more than the production of an amusing, well-made play. One need not look far to discover marked differences between his work and that of Dumas *fils*. The latter upbraids society vigorously, the former is optimistically indifferent to social reform; the play is all in all to Scribe, whereas to Dumas it is but the means

[12] *Ami des femmes*, Act. III, sc. 4, 136.
[13] *Pattes de mouche*, Act I, sc. 13.
[14] *Préface, Père prodigue*, III, p. 219.

to an end. Scribe attempts no profound analysis of the passions of his characters; Dumas, on the other hand, frequently develops scenes of poignant emotion. And yet, in spite of the differences which exist between these two dramatists, they have much in common; and the influence of Scribe upon Dumas *fils* is indisputable. From Scribe, Dumas derived his attention to subject-matter that would please the public, rapidity of movement, skillful arrangement of scenes to hold the interest of the audience in suspense, and, above all, logical construction of plot.

The influence of Balzac (1799-1850) upon Dumas *fils* is equally if not more apparent than that of Scribe. Just as Balzac, with his keen observation, painted in his novels a vivid picture of French life in the middle of the nineteenth century, so Dumas attempted to depict in his plays a panorama of contemporary society. We must bear in mind, however, that the *milieu* of Dumas was that of a restricted society of Paris only. Like Balzac, Dumas *fils* was gifted with a keen observation; but he had had an opportunity of observing a relatively small phase of French life and, lacking the imagination of Balzac, was unable to lend reality to a description of what he had not actually seen with his own eyes. The parallelism of Balzac and Dumas, in their attempt to portray contemporary society, receives frequent mention in works dealing with the French drama, and needs no further discussion here. There is, however, a most important influence to be found in Balzac which vitally affected not only the plays of Dumas *fils* but also the entire modern French theater. Inasmuch as critics have failed to emphasize this thought, it will be well to devote our attention to it for a moment.

In the *Avant-propos* to his *Comédie humaine* (1842), Balzac had elaborated an extensive scheme for his vast work. Following the theory of heredity of acquired characteristics laid down by Lamarck and also the theory of unity of composition among animals debated in 1830 by Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire and the Baron Cuvier, Balzac attempted to show that men are dependent upon their environment in the same way as are animals. On this system, he pretended to found his *Comédie humaine* in which all of his characters are intimately linked with, and are dependent upon, their environment. Without attempting to make a scientific study of these theories, Dumas embodied them, perhaps unconsciously, in

his plays. Thus, instead of presenting to the public a universal and perennial type, such as the Alceste or the Tartuffe of Molière, true of all countries in all ages, Dumas portrays characters existing only in France in the latter half of the nineteenth century.[15] In *La Femme de Claude*, Claude kills his wife because the law permits no divorce. The subsequent passing of the Naquet divorce bill in France thus discontinued the usefulness of the play as a work of social propaganda. While the portrayal of mankind dependent upon a particular environment is most interesting, and propounds many new problems, yet it has the disadvantage of running the risk of ceasing to interest future generations when represented on the stage. A well-constructed play will be read in future generations by students of the drama and will even be enjoyed upon the stage by the minority which takes pleasure in a play of real dramatic merit. The average audience, however, demands a play either in which the environment is one with which it is well-acquainted or in which there is a strong center of interest other than the background. On the other hand, the unenvironed comedy of Molière will not only live forever because it is well constructed, but will also interest the average audience because it is universally true.

We shall certainly have done a great injustice to Dumas *fils* and have entirely misled the reader if, as the result of our statements in this chapter, we have produced the impression that the work of Dumas *fils* consists in the servile imitation of others. Dumas was a dramatist steeped in the art of the theater and therefore susceptible to the assimilation of any ideas, theories, and methods appertaining thereto. Any borrowings which he may have made were in the name of dramatic art, which he greatly enriched, and any such literary debts were paid in full with generous interest besides. Let us now, before discussing the main currents of the dramatic development of Dumas, summarize briefly the material of the present chapter.

As we have seen, Dumas *fils* owes much to Corneille. The similarity of individual phrases through sound and connotation is

[15] The only two exceptions are *Les Danicheff*, in which the action takes place in Russia in 1851, and *La Comtesse Romani*, in which the scene is laid in Florence in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

either accidental or perhaps an unconscious resuscitation of the spirit of the great seventeenth-century writer. This, too, is doubtless true of individual ideas which Corneille expressed two centuries before Dumas. The methodical motivation of scenes which lead to crises, and which culminate in emotional soliloquies, is, on the other hand, indicative of a careful study of the method of Corneille by Dumas *fils*. But the characters of Corneille, heroes and heroines of ancient times, had little attraction for Dumas. Diderot, in the eighteenth century, had foreseen the advent of the drama which, forsaking the idealized characters of the early seventeenth-century stage, would deal with the people of our daily acquaintance and with the social problems which confront them. His visions were soon to become realities; for Beaumarchais succeeded in embodying them in his own work. From Beaumarchais thus descends the drama by which Dumas *fils* is universally known; and the influence of Beaumarchais upon Dumas *fils* becomes more apparent when we compare the rapid, broken, lifelike, conversational style of the two dramatists, and also the passion of each for expounding and elucidating his theories in prefaces. We find also, as we come down to the contemporaries of our author, that even as he was writing his plays he was influenced by the writers of his day. The Hugolian rehabilitation of fallen creatures finds a sympathetic heart-beat in the author of *La Dame aux camélias;* the clever man who matches his wits against those of a woman has a rôle both in the plays of Sardou and in those of Dumas *fils*. Of all the nineteenth-century influences, however, those of Scribe and Balzac are the most evident. Taking from Scribe the technique of dramatic juxtaposition, dexterity, and rapidity of action—in a word, the lasting qualities of the work of his predecessor—Dumas utilized them, to an entirely different end, in his own dramatic productions. And last, but by no means least, is Balzac. The dean of the nineteenth-century novel, with his theories of man's dependency upon environment, completely revolutionized the literature of his period. Open a copy of *Père Goriot* and notice the number of pages which the author devotes to a minute description of the Vauquer boarding-house, the background of the story; then reread *La Dame aux camélias* and *Le Demi-Monde* and observe how Dumas, in each instance, devotes the entire first act to a portrayal of the *milieu*.

Take any novel of Balzac, attempt to separate the action from its background, and notice how firmly the author has interwoven them. Perform the same experiment with a play of Dumas *fils* and what remains? Important as it is, however, environment and man's dependence upon environment do not form the only point of contact between the two writers; for the study of contemporary man himself is an additional great legacy which the novelist bequeathed to the dramatist. The field of Dumas is narrower than that of Balzac and his vision not so broad; but may we not say, having noted these limitations, that, in general, the plays of Dumas *fils* constitute the *Comédie humaine* of the dramatic literature of France during the period between 1852 and 1887?

CHAPTER III

DUMAS THE OBSERVER: THE COMEDY OF MANNERS

HAVING discussed the sources of the dramas of Dumas, and what he owes to others, let us now turn to an analysis of the main currents of his work. He is not, happily, a writer who has produced works of monotonous uniformity. He had a distinct aversion for a limited horizon: "If I had been the first man," he tells us, "I should have lost paradise myself, without the aid of the first woman; I should have fled before God turned me out—in order to see something else. . . . Why limit one's sight and cut off one's perspective? . . . Life is action. Let us vary its aspects. Let us change its perspectives."[1] Thus, his plays changed as his ideas progressed; and they fall so naturally into three distinct groups that this obvious classification has been adopted by the majority of historians of French literature. The first four plays[2] are obviously types of the *comédie de mœurs*, in which the dramatist attempts to put before the eyes of the public the manners and customs of France in his own day. He considers this to be a proper field for the playwright, "the theater being the delineation or the satire of passions and of manners."[3] He also has posterity in mind when he embraces this type of play for, as he states, "it is also to give to some extent to those who come after us—for we must not hide from ourselves the fact that some day we must die—as exact as possible a notion of the *va-et-vient* of our strange century, a century so curious, so restless, so credulous, so nervous, so exaggerated, so sentimental, so revolutionary, and so indulgent."[4] To those who accuse him of painting a picture which represents local conditions only, he replies cleverly, but not at all convincingly: " 'All that is local,' say the optimists, 'these are the manners of Paris and even of a Paris within Paris.' True indeed, but Paris is the brain of France, and when there is a tumor in the

[1] *A Charles Marchal*, II, p. 211.

[2] *La Dame aux camélias*, 1852; *Diane de Lys*, 1853; *Le Demi-Monde*, 1855; *La Question d'argent*, 1857.

[3] *Au public*, V, p. 70.

[4] *Préface, Fils naturel*, III, p. 10.

brain the whole system is affected, and sooner or later paralysis sets in."[5]

The theories of Diderot and the practical applications of those theories in the eighteenth century had directed the French drama very definitely toward the comedy of manners. The romantic movement, however, with its *Hernani*, its *Marie Tudor*, its *Burgraves*, its *Chatterton*, had interrupted the progress which was already well under way. Then, as romanticism began to wane, Scribe and his followers held the dramatic public, body and soul, offering it plays of slight artistic value, well-nigh devoid of trueness to life, concerned solely with amusing the audience. When Dumas *fils* produced *La Dame aux camélias* in 1852, he swept from the stage with one stroke the marionettes that Scribe had manipulated skillfully for many years before enthralled but somewhat surfeited audiences. As Sarcey relates: "He had, at twenty years of age, met Marguerite Gautier in the particular social circle in which she lived. He had loved; he had suffered; he had wept. He had transferred this story still warm and full of life, with all the details of the daily life which surrounded her real existence, scarcely suspecting that by introducing them into the action and by marking the accessory actors with characteristic traits, he was renewing the strength of the theater and was bringing about a revolution."[6] Dumas *fils* had written the play in one week, his enthusiasm fired with a desire to put into dramatic form the thoughts and feelings burning within his soul. But his ardor had ample time to cool; for, during a period of three years, he underwent the humiliations and disappointments of the youthful playwright in search of a producer. That he was the son of his father had little influence, when it was a question of producing a play of the type of *La Dame aux camélias;* on the contrary, producers were almost unanimous in their verdict that the family reputation would suffer rather than gain by its appearance. The subject-matter was not novel; for Hugo had some time ago produced *Marion Delorme;* and Augier, just a few years previously, had brought forth his *Aventurière*. Hugo had, however, placed the action in the time of Louis XIII, and Augier had been even more circumspect in

[5] *A propos de la Dame aux camélias*, I, p. 33.

[6] Sarcey: *Quarante ans de théâtre*, V, p. 170.

using Italy of the sixteenth century for his background. But now came a young man who dared to depict not a courtesan of historical legend, not an adventuress surrounded by a halo of poetic symbolism, but a "kept woman" of everyday contemporary life, and this author made his subject even more realistic by writing in ordinary prose. Finally, however, the play was produced at the *Vaudeville* on February 2, 1852, a date which, declares Doumic, "marks the foundation of the modern comedy of manners."[7]

The first act of the play gives little advancement to the plot. The love of Armand is indicated, and also the inception of Marguerite's love for him, but this is all. On the other hand, Dumas has sketched here with great vigor the life and surroundings of Marguerite Gautier; and in this act is evinced most strikingly that marvelous faculty of observation with which the author was abundantly endowed. In the second act, the plot swings into action. Marguerite, whose rich lovers have been legion without her loving a single one of them, has now actually fallen in love for the first time. She suggests an arrangement which she has planned whereby they may spend the summer together in a country house that she will rent. Armand hesitates, suspicious of the source of money that will render this possible, and discussion of the plan is postponed until the next day. Hardly has Armand left when the comte de Giray enters, and Marguerite elicits from him the promise of the funds of which she is in need without his knowing to what use they will be applied. She is about to go out to supper with the Count when a letter arrives from Armand who, having seen the Count enter, writes that he will never see Marguerite again. Armand, whose love is for the moment stronger than his jealousy, returns, however, and a reconciliation takes place.

The third act takes place at Auteuil, where Marguerite and Armand are spending the summer. In a conversation between Armand and Prudence, the latter admits that the Count has refused to advance any more money and that Marguerite has been disposing of her luxuries to pay the bills. Armand informs Prudence that he has been arranging a loan, to be negotiated in two weeks, and that Prudence must keep Marguerite in ignorance of the matter.

[7] Doumic: *Portraits d'écrivains*, p. 23

After Armand's departure for Paris for the purpose of arranging this and other business matters, his father arrives and, in a scene of poignant interest, he makes her understand that if she truly loves Armand she must sacrifice that love for the sake of the young man's future. She agrees, asking M. Duval to withdraw for a short while, so that when Armand returns he may remain unaware of his father's arrival. Armand comes back, uneasy, for he has learned that his father is on his way to see Marguerite. She pretends that he has not yet arrived, and goes out into the garden, ostensibly to avoid being present when M. Duval comes in. While Armand is left alone on the scene, a letter arrives from Marguerite which he starts to read just as his father enters. The contents of the letter, which the author cleverly withholds from the audience, cause Armand to fall sobbing into his father's arms.

The fourth act takes place in a salon in the home of Olympe where guests are amusing themselves by gambling. We now learn that Marguerite had written Armand that she had decided to abandon him in favor of de Varville. Armand does his utmost to provoke de Varville, who keeps his temper because Marguerite has instructed him to do so. Armand insists upon gambling with de Varville from whom he wins a considerable sum of money. At length, Marguerite succeeds in getting Armand alone and begs him to leave the house. Insults and recriminations follow on the part of Armand; but he finally begs her to come to live with him again. Marguerite sadly replies that she has given her oath not to do so; and, when Armand demands to know whether it is de Varville who has exacted the pledge, in order to maintain the deception she admits that it is so. Enraged, Armand calls in all of the guests from the adjoining room and exclaims: "Do you know what this Marguerite Gautier did? She sold everything she possessed to live with me, so greatly did she love me. That is beautiful, is it not? Now do you know what I did? I acted like a wretch. I accepted the sacrifice without giving anything in exchange. But it is not too late; I repent and return in order to make reparation. You are all witnesses that I owe nothing more to this woman." At the last words, he hurls at her the bank-notes which he has won from de Varville. The latter cries at him: "Indeed, sir, you are a coward"; and the others hasten to separate the two men.

Calm succeeds the storm in the final act. We are in the bedroom of Marguerite who, worn out by her emotions, is about to die, neglected by all save one or two faithful friends. She rereads a letter from M. Duval who, appreciating the sacrifice of Marguerite, has written the entire truth to his son. Marguerite's one hope is that Armand, who had gone to a distant place, will return before she breathes her last. Finally he arrives, broken-hearted and humbled. Marguerite forgets everything in her joy and is filled with a supreme desire to live again. She rises from her bed; but this last emotion is fatal, and she dies in Armand's arms.

We can well imagine how great must have been the chagrin of the producers who had refused to put *La Dame aux camélias* on the stage, for it took Paris by storm. It is indeed difficult to conceive of a spectator so callous as to witness such a performance without feeling his heart full as scene follows upon scene. The two central characters think, feel, and speak of nothing but the tremendous love which dominates them, which is at the same time the cause of their greatest joy and their greatest despair. And, in spite of the relentless swiftness of the action, the final catastrophe is ever imminent, holding the spectator breathless lest it break upon its victims and ruthlessly crush them. Is it any wonder that Sarcey, who is by no means an impulsive critic, felt impelled to write even as late as 1884, thirty years after the first performance of the play: "And now I have only one word to say to those who love dramatic art: do not fail to see *La Dame aux camélias*. It is one of the truest and most touching plays that have ever appeared on the stage."[8]

It must be admitted that the second play of Dumas, *Diane de Lys*, produced for the first time at the *Gymnase-Dramatique* on November 15, 1853, has little to recommend it. It is curious that *La Dame aux camélias*, written in a week, should be so evidently superior to this play written by Dumas at his leisure. We must remember, however, that, in writing *La Dame aux camélias*, Dumas was putting into dramatic form a theme which, highly dramatic in itself, had appeared several years before in novel form. It represented, furthermore, the recording of events and

[8] Sarcey: *Quarante ans de théâtre*, V, p. 199.

feelings which the author had seen and felt. *Diane de Lys*, on the other hand, was a play which had to be built. The author had to deliberate frequently over what course he was to pursue. As he tells us in the notes to the play: "I conversed frequently with my friend Henri Mirault concerning this play while I was engaged in writing it. I was convinced that at the end of the play Paul Aubry should be killed by the Count; but I hesitated a great deal when I considered the habits of the theater in which this drama was to be produced. Kill a man by a revolver shot on a stage where adultery had always been given a happy and frequently a comic ending! What would the habitués of the *Gymnase* say? Tradition said to me: 'Patch things up.' The situation and logic told me: 'Kill him!' I decided in favor of logic."[9]

The plot of the play is not very complicated. Maximilien, friend of the artist Paul Aubry, borrows his studio for a *rendez-vous* with Diane de Lys whose marriage to the comte de Lys has been an unhappy one. Later, Maximilien introduces Paul to Diane, and they fall in love with each other. Although their relations remain perfectly honorable, Diane compromises herself by the frequency of the visits which she permits Paul to make and also by appearing in public with him. The Count attempts to force Diane to leave immediately with him and go to Germany where he has accepted an embassy. She refuses; whereupon he threatens a separation. She agrees to the separation; and the Count and Diane depart for Italy where she is to be returned to her father. Paul follows the couple, and succeeds in visiting Diane at a hotel where she and her husband have stopped to break their journey. The Count appears on the scene just at the moment when Paul is about to induce Diane to desert her husband and flee with him. Thoroughly master of himself, and in no wise carried away by his emotions, the Count coldly informs Paul that if he ever finds him and Diane together again under similar conditions, he will kill him.

Paul continues his pursuit, but a poor artist has difficulty in competing with the wealth of a millionaire. His funds soon give out and he is compelled to return to Paris. The idea of separation from her husband is postponed by Diane when she learns that her

[9] *Théâtre complet*, vol. VIII, *Notes inédites*, p. 46.

father is desperately ill, and she writes to Paul to tell him that she must stay with her father, but will see him again some time. Six months pass, however, and no letter arrives. Finally, when Maximilien shows Paul a letter from Diane to her friend Marceline, in which she indicates that she is perfectly happy with her husband, Paul becomes bitter. He is in the act of destroying her former letters when Diane appears on the scene. Paul denounces her actions; but, in the ensuing conversation, learns that the letters of both have been intercepted. While they are still conversing, there is a knock at the door. Knowing that it must be the Count, Paul seizes two swords and flings open the door which has been locked from the inside. A shot resounds, Paul falls to the floor, and the Count enters declaring: "This man was my wife's lover. I have brought about justice; I have killed him."

Weaknesses abound in this second play of Dumas *fils*. The five acts move much less rapidly than those of the preceding play, and evidences of padding are apparent. Nevertheless, the drama is interesting to us in that this second début of the dramatist is his real début; for here we find the genuine Dumas such as he is to reveal himself to us more and more in subsequent plays. *Diane de Lys*, insignificant as a work of dramatic art, foreshadows the author's future greatness and contains many of the elements characteristic of his dramatic system. The characters are more skillfully drawn than those of the later thesis-plays; and Dumas has thereby retained one of the points of strength of *La Dame aux camélias*. Another point of excellence is the attention which the author gives to emotional and dramatic act-endings. This is particularly true at the end of the fourth act where the Count leaves the stage with a threat to kill Paul. The latter, left alone on the stage, exclaims: "C'est bien, monsieur le comte; à nous deux, maintenant!" This promise of a future struggle, this eagerness for battle, is highly characteristic of the entire work of Dumas *fils*.

The coolness of the murder which terminates the play is likewise premonitory of the Dumas of later plays; for we shall find the situation repeated at the conclusion of *La Femme de Claude*. It foreshadows the later work of the dramatist also in that this very coolness on the part of the Count counterbalances the emotionality of Paul throughout the entire play. Dumas was always a

great lover of contrasts as we shall later have occasion to indicate. Lastly, the play predicts the Dumas of later plays by its careful attention to detail. Notice that, at the end of the play, Paul takes down *two* swords just before the Count enters. Without a word being spoken, we know that he is to challenge the Count to a duel. Then, suddenly and quite contrary to our expectations, the shot is fired and Paul falls. This detail of the two swords, apparently slight, is a masterstroke in the culmination of the play.

The third play of Dumas, *Le Demi-Monde*, first appeared at the *Gymnase-Dramatique* on March 20, 1855. The first act bears a marked similarity to the initial act of *La Dame aux camélias* in that it is little more than an act of orientation, acquainting the spectator with the sphere in which the action is to develop. Here too just one element of the plot is indicated, the love of de Nanjac for Suzanne, merely a slender thread to excite the interest of the audience and to bind the first act with those that are to follow.

There is little doubt that the success of the play was to a considerable extent due to its title, a word which Dumas himself had coined and which immediately became unofficially adopted as part of the regular spoken vocabulary. As Olivier de Jalin explains in the second act, the *demi-monde* is an island that floats in the Parisian ocean and which hails, admits, and accepts all who fall, all who emigrate, all who escape from the mainland, not to mention haphazard wrecks of fortune whose original abode is unknown. Its inhabitants are those who have committed a fault which has excluded them from their former social circle. Some have descended into it from a superior world; others have climbed to reach it from an inferior level. Three women are typical of this *demi-monde:* Madame de Santis, a so-called 'widow' whose husband has driven her from his home upon discovering her infidelity; the vicomtesse de Vernières, actually a widow, who brings into the unwholesome atmosphere her niece Marcelle, a charming young girl who, in spite of her innocence, is rapidly developing a false perspective of life from the surroundings in which she finds herself; and Suzanne, a social climber.

With the second act, the main action develops and thenceforth moves rapidly toward its dénouement. Two men belonging to the 'mainland' arrive upon the 'island' of the *demi-monde*. One of

these is Raymond de Nanjac who, having spent ten years in Africa, has lost his sense of evaluating properly the altered society of Paris and, having met Suzanne, baronne d'Ange, has fallen under her charm. The other, Olivier de Jalin, a man of clever discernment, has entered the *demi-monde* for the amusement which it affords him. Suzanne, who has arrived in the *demi-monde* only after strenuous social climbing from a lower sphere and who is an unscrupulous woman, encourages the attentions of de Nanjac, hoping to become his wife and thereby emancipate herself from her present circle, to enter an uncontaminated society from which she is at present excluded. Raymond de Nanjac thus finds himself in a most embarrassing dilemma, between the cunning wiles of the woman who is exploiting him and the warnings of Olivier, whose mistress Suzanne had been, and who, charmed by the integrity of Raymond, is unwilling to see him ruin his life. But love is blind, at least temporarily, and a duel ensues between Raymond and Olivier in which the latter is slightly wounded. At length, however, Olivier succeeds in forcing Suzanne to reveal her true self so that de Nanjac breaks with her; and Olivier marries Marcelle who for some time has loved him and who has, through Olivier's warnings, escaped the contagion of the *demi-monde*.

The reader will immediately perceive that Dumas has here realized his conception of the *comédie de mœurs*. *La Dame aux camélias* had been a play of this category; but sentiment had dominated it, and the *milieu* of Marguerite had served merely as a background for the main theme, the ever-prevalent love of Armand and Marguerite. The *demi-monde*, on the other hand, is the essence itself of the play that bears its name. *La Dame aux camélias* was a play of love; *Le Demi-Monde* is a play of wits, and in this dramatic mental struggle the *demi-monde* dominates at all times the thoughts and actions of the players. Thus, with this play, Dumas appears as a revolutionary even more than in his first play. He has now rejected practically all of the traditions of the 'conventional' theater, infused in it a realism unknown to previous plays of the nineteenth century, and centered interest upon local social conditions. This latter quality is, perhaps, the play's greatest enemy, for *Le Demi-Monde* is too essentially Parisian to impress an audience unacquainted not alone with Paris, but particularly with the Paris of

1855. The shortcomings of *Diane de Lys* disappear completely in the third play with perhaps one exception, that of over-insistence upon a certain detail. So eager is Dumas to inform us that Olivier de Jalin is an *honnête homme* that he insists upon the fact nine times throughout the play, even having Olivier himself admit it several times! Yet, by its compactness of construction, its clarity, and its scintillating logic, *Le Demi-Monde* stands out clearly as a work of merit.

Sarcey claims that it is a thesis-comedy:

> The *Demi-Monde* brought something else which, without being absolutely new, was at least renewed at one stroke. It created the thesis-comedy. The thesis-comedy has always existed in our theater; it is a spontaneous product of our French mind which delights in surrounding a moral idea or a paradox with all of its proofs, with a splendid logical apparatus. *Les Femmes savantes*, *Le Tartuffe*, *Le Misanthrope*, indeed almost the entire theater of Molière, enters into the category of the thesis-comedy. The secret of it seemed to be lost; Dumas found it again in the *Demi-Monde*. This is his thesis: that a fallen woman, a comtesse d'Ange, a Suzanne d'Ange, whatever wit, whatever fortune, whatever veneer of good breeding she may have, cannot enter the world of respectable people which must be pitilessly closed to her.[10]

It would seem that Sarcey, in making this criticism, is somewhat ahead of the procession. He wrote the foregoing lines in 1900, after having had the opportunity of investigating the entire dramatic works of Dumas *fils*, and not immediately after the production of the *Demi-Monde*, when he could not know what the future tendencies of the dramatist would be. Had Dumas intended to make this thought the thesis and consequently the main purpose of the play, we should be certain to find greater development of that theme through the spokesman of the play, Olivier de Jalin. It is true that in the last scene he says to Suzanne: "It is not I who prevent your marriage: it is reason; it is justice; it is the social law which insists that an honorable man marry only a respectable woman"; but elsewhere his long tirades are merely descriptive of the *demi-monde*. We might take the criticism of Sarcey and with very slight changes make it read: "a fallen woman, a Marguerite Gautier, whatever fortune she may possess, however purified her

[10] Sarcey: *Quarante ans de théâtre*, V, pp. 174-175.

soul may be through love, whatever sacrifice she may make to that love, cannot enter the world of respectable people which must remain pitilessly closed to her." Yet no one, least of all Sarcey, would call *La Dame aux camélias* a thesis-play. What is true, however, and what lies included within Sarcey's criticism, is that step by step Dumas was at this time progressing toward the thesis-play. The thesis exists, completely unemphasized, in *La Dame aux camélias;* it becomes more evident in *Le Demi-Monde;* it comes further to the front in *La Question d'argent;* and it entirely occupies the foreground in *Le Fils naturel,* as we shall observe later.

With his fourth play, *La Question d'argent,* which had its first performance on January 31, 1857, at the *Gymnase-Dramatique,* Dumas suddenly expanded the *comédie de mœurs* from a delineation of local conditions to a subject of universal scope and interest. The play is so well-known that a very brief summary will suffice to recall it to mind. Jean Giraud, son of a gardener, a man of astute financial ability, employs legal but unethical means in quickly amassing a fortune. As his wealth increases, his ambition to frequent more exclusive circles grows. Having loaned a sum of money to the scapegrace son of Durieu, a penurious but honorable bourgeois, he has secured a foothold in the latter's home. Here he meets Élisa de Roncourt, whose father has impoverished himself in order to pay his brother's debts. Only after passing through a period of great distress has de Roncourt succeeded in securing a position with the comtesse Savelli as trustee of her much involved financial affairs. Giraud quickly sees possibilities in the people with whom he has come into contact. He persuades Durieu to allow him to invest 40,000 francs for him and returns the sum a month later with a surplus of 20,000 francs. The deal, however, is subject to Durieu's promise to enter partnership with him; for Giraud needs a respectable name to cover his future exploitations. He courts Élisa de Roncourt, who agrees to marry him, realizing that in this way only can she secure the comforts necessary for her father's old age. It is only when the marriage contract is drawn up that she realizes, from its contents, that Giraud is marrying her for the respectability of her environment and has so arranged the marriage settlement that he may at any future time utilize the money allotted to her in case his financial opera-

tions fail. This money, being in her name, could not be claimed by his creditors. Although the first bans have been published, she breaks off the marriage. Meanwhile, Giraud has borrowed larger sums of money from both Durieu and the comtesse Savelli. News comes that Giraud has absconded; and, for a time, the victims are greatly chagrined, but suddenly he appears at the appointed moment. He had purposely spread the news of his departure in order to cause a drop on the Exchange. The Countess and Durieu refuse to accept more than the legal rate of gain on the investments confided to the care of Giraud, and the latter is dismissed with the statement that his conception of financial dealings is incompatible with that of the society in which the others move.

Dumas was not the first French writer of the nineteenth century to treat the money-question on the stage. Théodore Barrière had produced *Les faux Bonshommes* in 1856, the year preceding the appearance of *La Question d'argent*. It is possible that this work had influenced Dumas to some extent; but it is more probable that both Barrière and Dumas were more directly inspired by Balzac's *Mercadet*, produced in 1851.[11] In this play, Balzac transported to the stage the money-question which he had so frequently agitated in his novels. As we shall see later, the question of money was a constant preoccupation of Dumas *fils*. In his subsequent plays, it is treated more from the point of view of the marriage for money. In 1857, the play with money as a central point of interest was more or less a novelty. To-day, the theme has become rather shop-worn, because of the great number of plays which, following in the foot-steps of *La Question d'argent*, took up the same topic, treating it from slightly different angles.[12]

For convenience in classification, we may add to the first four plays *Un Père prodigue*, first produced at the *Gymnase-Dramatique* on November 30, 1859. This play also is a comedy of manners in which the comte de la Rivonnière has been considered by many to be a portraiture of Dumas *père*. The Count, whose wife had left him at her death with a considerable fortune and a young son

[11] This play had been published as early as 1830, but was produced only in 1851, after Balzac's death, in a version revised by d'Ennery.

[12] Cf. particularly: Émile Fabre: *L'Argent*, 1895; *Le Bien d'autrui*, 1897; *Les Ventres dorés*, 1905; Octave Mirbeau: *Les Affaires sont les Affaires*, 1903; Eugène Brieux: *L'Armature*, 1905.

André, has reared the child in the midst of lavish expenditures and in none too moral an atmosphere His own servants rob him and parasitic friends abound. Among the latter is a certain woman with whom André is in love and who is known rather indefinitely as the 'woman in black.' Grown to manhood, André remonstrates with his father, explaining that little remains of the family fortune. He agrees to share equally what remains of the money and advises his father to settle down and live on a more modest scale. The Count agrees; for he is about to ask Hélène de Brignac, a young girl of twenty, to be his wife. They depart together for Dieppe where the formal request for the lady's hand is to be made. When Hélène's aunt, the marquise de Chavry, paving the way, asks the girl to describe the type of man whom she would consider an eligible husband, Hélène expresses her views on marriage with such clearness that the Count, who has paused on the threshold with André, realizes that André, and not himself, represents the ideal of which she is dreaming. He therefore asks for the hand of Hélène not for himself but for his only son.

After the wedding, the Count takes up his abode with the young couple; but difficulties soon ensue. His continued prodigalities, now heaped upon Hélène, arouse André's anger and jealousy. After a temporary absence from home for a few days, André discovers that his father had admitted to the house the 'woman in black.' The Count hastens to explain that he has kept this woman's identity hidden from Hélène and that, in the future, the 'woman in black' will send her letters to André in envelopes addressed to the Count, so that if they are intercepted they may appear to be written to him instead.

Two friends of the Count, de Tournas and Mme Godefroy, now inform him that people are criticizing him for living under the same roof with the woman with whom he was formerly in love. They also assure him that André is suspicious of him. To reassure himself, the Count tells André that he has decided to go to Italy. To his consternation, André advises him to go and makes no effort to retain him. André and Hélène soon leave for the country; and the Count, certain now that his son no longer loves him, takes into his home Albertine de la Borde who, whatever her faults may be, maintains his household on a business-like scale.

André later returns to Paris, upbraids his father for living with a woman of evil reputation, and threatens to expel him from the house, André's own property, unless the Count breaks off relations with Albertine. The Count accuses André of lack of filial devotion and asks him to straighten out their financial accounts so that he may depart and live alone under obligations to no one. At this juncture, M. de Prailles enters with a letter. The Count sees that it is from the 'woman in black' and is about to send a servant into the adjoining room to deliver it when M. de Prailles stops him. M. de Prailles wishes to follow the servant to find the man to whom the letter is addressed; for the 'woman in black' is Mme de Prailles, and her husband has discovered the liaison. The Count immediately asserts that he is the lover of Mme de Prailles and that his action in sending the servant into the adjoining room was merely a ruse, for he doubted the identity of M. de Prailles. The latter forthwith challenges the Count to a duel. Entirely unaware that his relations with Mme de Prailles have been discovered, and still insistent upon separation from his father, André straightens out their entangled financial affairs and arranges a settlement with Albertine. He learns, however, from his servant Joseph, that his father is engaged in a duel with de Prailles and, seized with the fear that his father may be killed in expiation for his own faults, he is momentarily in the depths of despair. The Count, however, soon reappears, for he has wounded de Prailles, and André, won over by the sacrifice of this father who, in spite of his irresponsible actions, has attempted to save his son's life, fully forgives his prodigal father.

Un Père prodigue is in some measure an off-shoot of the *Demi-Monde*, with the reservation that it is a character rather than the general background that is most emphasized. Despite its sordidness, the plot possesses great possibilities; and the author has handled it with a certain amount of dexterity. At several points during the play, the action might have deviated, to take an entirely different course, and the interweaving of events has been directed with so sure a hand that the audience is ever alert to discover what the final solution is to be. Every act ends with a promise of something to come which will be of vital interest to the spectator, and the actual dénouement is withheld until the curtain is about to fall.

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Centering interest upon a definite character, the dramatist has supported his play with an action that constantly gains momentum. The ultimate result is the construction of an interesting and very diverting comedy, but unfortunately one of little permanent value. It is a very tolerable comedy of character, a rather good comedy of manners, but not a conspicuously great comedy of any type.

In summarizing the early plays of Dumas *fils* before passing on to a discussion of the second phase of his career, what do we find? First, that his initial play emphasizes not the background in which the characters move, but the perennial theme of love. The drama represents a romantic theme treated in a realistic manner. Aside from the excellent qualities which it possesses as a mere theatrical production, it indicates a revolution in the development of the French theater and marks the foundation of the modern *comédie de mœurs*. The second play, *Diane de Lys*, by no means maintains the standard of its predecessor, but interests us because of its promise for the future. Here we see at every turn incipient characteristics of the Dumas of subsequent plays: emotional and dramatic act-endings, sharp contrasts of color, attention to minute detail, logical progress toward an inevitable dénouement. All of these ear-marks of the Dumas type of play are to appear again in various stages of development and under different perspectives in the later works of the dramatist. With his third play, *Le Demi-Monde*, Dumas reaches a point of high perfection in the comedy of manners; for here the entire dramatic action is dependent upon the social conditions which environ it. The *milieu* depicted was, however, local, and could hardly be of universal interest. This one defect the author remedied in his next work, *La Question d'argent*, by choosing a background and a topic that have been utilized by other dramatists in many plays even until very recent years. *Un Père prodigue*, written several years later, but also a comedy of observation, may be included in this group of early dramas. Throughout all the plays of observation by Dumas *fils* in this first period, the author progressively lays more and more stress upon his underlying theme; gradually but insistently the thesis comes further into evidence until, finally, it becomes the dramatist's main preoccupation and he is at length ready for the second phase of his development.

CHAPTER IV

DUMAS THE MORALIST: THE THESIS-DRAMA

HAVING attempted to portray the customs of his time with all of their shortcomings, Dumas *fils* next asks himself: Since these questions and conditions exist, what are we going to do to ameliorate the situation? He states: "When confronted with any dramatic situation which he has created, the author must ask himself three things: In such a situation, what should I do? What would others do? What should be done?"[1] This last remark, "What should be done?" makes of Dumas a moralist. Dissatisfied with being a mere observer, he begins, in 1858, with *Le Fils naturel*, to be a reformer. "Art for art's sake? Words devoid of meaning! . . . Let us inaugurate the useful theater. . . . L'homme moral est déterminé, l'homme social est à faire," he declares.[2] Thus, between the years 1858 and 1873, Dumas *fils* develops the thesis-play, in which he uses the stage as a pulpit and preaches his doctrines to the French public, urging it to action, to better living, and to reformation of social laws.[3] More definitely than ever before in his career, does the author appear as a revolutionary. Molière had, in a way, written thesis-plays; Émile Augier was writing social comedies; but Dumas, in his conception of the thesis-play, takes for his theme a contradiction between contemporary manners and the law which governs them, or an incongruity between public opinion and his own viewpoint. With Molière, public opinion was right, and he who refused to conform thereto fared badly; witness, for instance, Alceste. With Dumas *fils*, public opinion was usually wrong, and should be modified to coincide with true morality; witness, for example, *Les Idées de madame Aubray*. No longer does Dumas at this stage of his career choose a subject purely for the sake of a dramatic situation, or for a particular rôle, as he had previously done in

[1] *Au public*, V, p. 78.
[2] *Préface, Fils naturel*, III, pp. 30-31.
[3] These plays include primarily: *Le Fils naturel*, 1858; *L'Ami des femmes*, 1864; *Les Idées de madame Aubray*, 1867; *Une Visite de noces*, 1871; *La Princesse Georges*, 1871; *Monsieur Alphonse*, 1873.

La Dame aux camélias. It is now the idea that prevails; and the man of the theater is subordinated to the moralist. Always combatively inclined, he now becomes so to an intense degree. In these plays, as we might expect, the *raisonneur* has a much larger rôle and the dialogue is less dramatic externally; for action must become static as the spokesman preaches to the public.

The public, moreover, was delighted. As Paul Bourget tells us: "The Moralist. That is indeed the first word that comes to our minds when we attempt to define the talent of M. Dumas. . . . His voice pronounced precisely the words of which the crowd felt its need. . . . People flocked to that man because he spoke of them and of their secret or public miseries."[4] We must not assume that the public took delight in these plays because it agreed with the author; for, in most cases, he was condemning the public opinion of which his spectators were the representatives. Perhaps they went to hear him much in the way that we sometimes go on Sunday to hear the preacher who denounces the practises of which we are guilty during the week. We feel that he is morally right even though we cannot live up to his admonitions; that he is sincere; that his preaching is good for our souls; and that he exercises our intelligence with timely topics.

The timeliness of his topics is an element of great strength in the thesis-play of Dumas; but it is, unfortunately, at the same time a weakness. This type of drama demands social reform; but, once the purpose of the play has been realized and the reform effected, the play ceases to interest the public because the thesis is no longer valid. *La Princesse Georges*, 1871, and *La Femme de Claude*, 1873, lose the force of their preaching when the Naquet divorce bill of 1884 goes into effect; for the problem ceases to be a problem if the hypothesis is invalid. One thing, however, saves the thesis-plays of Dumas from falling into oblivion even though they may fall into disuse as weapons of social propaganda. In the thesis-play, not only did Dumas *fils* excite the intelligence of his audience, but at the same time did he succeed in stirring their emotions. As Émile Faguet observes: "To make one think in the theater and at the same time stir one's emotions has been given to few men. Dumas practically never accomplished the one without the other.

[4] Bourget: *Nouveaux essais de psychologie contemporaine*, p. 7.

That is the reason why the title of thinker as well as that of dramatist is due him and will remain to him. The thinker is not he who draws a conclusion; nothing is easier than that. It is he who leaves behind him a long, a powerful, and perchance a fecund excitation of the public mind."[5]

Although the public welcomed the predication of Dumas *fils*, contemporary critics did not share this enthusiasm. Sarcey took Dumas severely to task for attempting to preach:

> That he try to instruct me, well and good; I even consent to his saddening my soul; but I want this sadness to be open and tender, and I want in this instruction a pleasure of satisfied sensibility; I want , . . well, I do not know exactly what I do want. I do know full well, however, what I don't want. I don't want him to annoy me—there—is that understood? Dumas preaches to me incessantly. I listen to his preaching, I find it correct, and I leave the theater not quite so good as when I entered. Corrected? That is not the question. The theater never corrected anybody, and I do not go there to hear a sermon.[6]

In a certain measure, this criticism is justified. Sarcey was a dramatic critic interested above all in the well-made play, and therefore judged a play for its dramatic value. He had praised *La Dame aux camélias* fulsomely because, in that instance, the play was all in all; but, with the thesis-plays, he saw ideas taking precedence over dramatic action; he saw Dumas the thinker dominating Dumas the dramatist, the playwright, the man of the theater.

In this criticism by Sarcey, the statement that the theater never corrected anybody raises an interesting point. Did Dumas claim that it did? He has expressed himself on the subject in several places, but not with his usual clearness and precision. In 1868, he wrote: "In short, I write for those who think as I do; it is useless to combat the opinion of others. You succeed at times in conquering people in a discussion, but in convincing them, never. Opinions are like nails: the harder one taps upon them the deeper one drives them in."[7] Later, in 1873, he made the statement: "No one, unless he were mad, could have the pretension of effecting a general reform all by himself, but it is probable that this reform must take place gradually."[8] Finally, in 1892, he de-

[5] Faguet: *Propos de théâtre*, IV, p. 63.
[6] From a *feuilleton* of Sarcey in *Le Temps*, October 16, 1871.
[7] *Préface, Fils naturel*, III, p. 10.
[8] *A M. Cuvillier-Fleury*, V, p. 189.

clared: "What no one can deprive me of is the influence that certain of my works have had upon ideas, upon manners, and even upon laws; it is also the right of saying to myself, when I see certain forms of progress accomplished, the same thing that workmen say to themselves when they take a Sunday stroll through new quarters: 'Just the same, I had a hand in building those houses.' "[9] It would thus seem that Dumas did not hope, as Sarcey indicates, to accomplish reform by immediate conversion of his audience to his own point of view, but rather by forcefully presenting to sympathizers views which they themselves entertained in perhaps vague form. These men, aroused from apathetic inertia and converted to dynamic men of action through the author's statement of his case, would be the missionaries who would gain converts and thus gradually bring about the reform. Dumas himself, while not being the direct instigator of the reform, would at least have the satisfaction of feeling that he had laid the foundation stones of the structure.

The first of this group of plays was *Le Fils naturel;* and, with its initial performance at the *Gymnase-Dramatique* on January 16, 1858, Dumas really created a new *genre,* the modern thesis-drama. It is by no means astonishing that, arriving at the theater of ideas, he should choose such a theme; for it was a subject with which he was entirely familiar, he himself belonging to the group of unfortunate illegitimate children. So greatly had he suffered that the subject became a preoccupation, an obsession; and, before death brought a termination to his career, he had treated this topic in six different plays[10] and had devoted to it two lengthy prefaces.[11] What is astonishing, however, is that Dumas should have had the courage to revert so often and so frankly to this theme when all Paris knew the circumstances of his birth. *Le Fils naturel* is without doubt the best exposition the author succeeded in giving this subject on the stage. Compared with the other plays of Dumas, the plot is a complicated one; and yet the author has presented his subject with great clarity and with unusual firmness.

[9] *Notes sur la princesse de Bagdad,* VII, p. 97.

[10] *Le Fils naturel; Les Idées de madame Aubray; Monsieur Alphonse; Le Filleul de Pompignac; Le Supplice d'une femme; Héloïse Paranquet.*

[11] *Préface, Fils naturel; Préface, Monsieur Alphonse.*

The plot runs as follows. Rather than accept any money from the rich Sternay who, taking advantage of her confiding love, had dishonored her, Clara Vignot does needlework to support herself and her illegitimate child. Aristide Fressart, a companion of her youth and a man of high ideals, visits her from time to time and attempts to advise and comfort her. Just after Clara has nursed her child through a serious illness, Sternay appears and tells her that he must leave France immediately in order to repair the family fortune which is about to go to ruin. He seems little interested in his child, but protests his love for Clara. Soon after his departure, however, Clara learns that he had no intention of leaving France but was about to marry.

We now find ourselves in the country home of the Sternays many years later. Charles Sternay has married Henriette; and they live with Sternay's mother, a marchioness, his uncle, a marquis, and his niece Hermine. The latter, a charming, innocent young girl, has fallen in love with Jacques de Boisceny, a young man of sterling qualities. The marquis looks with favor upon Jacques; but the marchioness refuses to consent to the marriage because practically nothing is known of Jacques' family connections. Aristide, who is now a lawyer of comfortable means, comes to make the official request of marriage for his client and godson Jacques. He informs the marchioness that Jacques' name is not Boisceny and that he is an illegitimate child. When the marchioness ridicules the thought of Hermine's marriage with such an ignoble person, Aristide tells her that Jacques is the son of Charles Sternay and Clara Vignot and therefore her own grandson. Jacques and Hermine are thus cousins. The marchioness persists in her refusal, and Aristide predicts that he will find a means of bringing about the marriage. He then announces to Jacques a fact that the latter had never known, that he is an illegitimate child and the son of Sternay.

Jacques immediately approaches Sternay and demands to know why the latter has never recognized him. Sternay attempts to explain that the standards of society would not permit this. As Jacques demands further elucidation upon this point, Clara intervenes and explains that after Charles had left her many years before, she fell ill and was cared for by Lucien, the owner of

the house in which she lived. When she became well and in turn nursed Lucien, whose careless life had made an invalid of him, the latter had died in spite of her care and had left her his entire fortune. Society, ever uncharitable in its interpretations, had thus believed her to be Lucien's mistress. Jacques is thus forced to admit that his father had an excuse for not recognizing him, and his day of trial is further saddened by reception of the news that Hermine is to be put into a convent until she becomes of age.

Meanwhile Sternay has become ambitious and wishes to become a *député*. Soliciting the influence of the marquis, he succeeds in obtaining the latter's promise to introduce him to the secretary of the minister. Sternay also would like his uncle to adopt him, thereby giving him a title. The marquis aptly retorts that, inasmuch as Sternay had never been willing to give a name to his son, he sees no reason why he should give a name to his nephew. Soon after this interview, Sternay discovers that Jacques is the secretary of the minister; and he changes his attitude toward Jacques from one of hostility to that of seeking favor. Meanwhile, the marquis has complicated matters by signifying his intention to adopt Jacques. Sternay is now very eager to recognize Jacques; and, in a long scene in which all of the legal technicalities concerning illegitimacy are fully developed, Aristide explains that the marquis may either legitimize or recognize Jacques, but that even the latter act is denied Sternay because he never gave six years of uninterrupted support and care to his son.

Jacques' name is now in all the papers. He has accomplished an important diplomatic mission and the minister has offered him any position that he may desire. Sternay redoubles his efforts to be recognized as the father of such an illustrious son and consents to the latter's marriage with Hermine. Fully explaining the story of his birth to Hermine, Jacques asks her for her opinion. She reaffirms her willingness to marry him, and advises him to retain his mother's name. The play ends with the announcement by Jacques that he has secured for Sternay the title of Count.

We shall have occasion to speak of *Le Fils naturel* later, in several other connections. Suffice it to say here that it is free from most of the drawbacks which a thesis usually entails. In it, dramatic values are not obscured by ideas, even though these theories

may be in the ascendency. The characters are well delineated and excellently contrasted. Taken in relation to the rest of the dramatic work of the author, it represents his first great defiance of the Code and his first great challenge to the public. When, in *La Question d'argent*, René informed Jean Giraud at the end of the play that cultured people expected an honest woman to marry an honest man and that therefore Giraud was ineligible, the public applauded for it agreed with the author. In the case of *Le Fils naturel*, however, the spectators were disappointed that Jacques did not fall into his father's arms and accept his name; for they were of the opinion that any other man, in Sternay's place, would have acted pecisely as he had done. Dumas tells us that, as the last rehearsals for the play were taking place, Montigny, the director, said to him:

> Then, after all that, the father and son are not going to fly into each other's arms?
>
> No.
>
> The spectator would rejoice so over such an action.
>
> The whole plan of my play leads and must lead to the opposite solution. I have arranged it entirely for this new solution.
>
> That is very harsh.
>
> It must be so.
>
> You will lose twenty or twenty-five performances with your dénouement.
>
> I shall perhaps make up for them later on.

Montigny was right. The play would have had a longer run had Dumas pandered to public taste and changed his ending. But Dumas, too, was right. The play was successful; and, furthermore, he had scored a signal victory. He had convinced Montigny that he could adhere to his own ideas in spite of the public; and thereafter Montigny was willing to accept, at the *Gymnase-Dramatique*, plays of Dumas which he formerly would have considered doomed to failure. With its challenge to public opinion, *Le Fils naturel* was the author's great experimental play in a new field. It is perhaps temerarious to assert that the failure of this play would have resulted in the abandonment by Dumas of the thesis-play as a dramatic vehicle; for he was a man of indomitable courage and tenacity. On the other hand, the success of the play convinced

him that this was his true field; and it is certain that it is to this type of drama that Dumas owes his reputation.

The next thesis-play, *L'Ami des femmes*, produced for the first time at the *Gymnase-Dramatique* on March 5, 1864, contrasts pitifully with *Le Fils naturel*. In this play, de Ryons is an ultra-clever man who has made a specialty of the study of women's hearts. He delights in meeting a woman in difficulty, in becoming the confidant of her troubles, and in patching up the trouble, thereby fulfilling his rôle of the *ami des femmes*. On this particular occasion, he meets Jane who, filled with romantic notions, but utterly ignorant on the subject of marriage, has wedded de Simerose. The realities of married life were a complete shock to her and, disillusioned, she repelled her husband who, impatient at her attitude, made no secret of his attentions to other women. Eventually, he and Jane had made an agreement to live separately; and, at the time that the play begins, this state of affairs had been going on for some time.

A woman in such a position was an ideal subject for de Ryons' experimentation. He cleverly elicits her interest by telling her how once, on a journey to Strassburg, a veiled woman had entered the train compartment with him. Detecting tears in her eyes, he offered her a bottle of smelling-salts which he always carried in a small case containing other things of which a woman might be in need. Turning to him she answered in English: "Thank you," and thus the incident ended. But since then, declares de Ryons, he has been searching in vain for this woman; for he had fallen in love with her. The audience is, for a while, convinced that the woman of the story is Jane.

In the meanwhile, de Montègre has fallen deeply in love with Jane and has acknowledged to her his passion. Yearning for some one who will truly understand and love her, but knowing de Montègre to be a most suspicious person who is constantly aroused to jealousy, Jane writes him a note: "Come tomorrow; all I ask is to believe you." She soon learns, however, that de Montègre is unworthy of her; for, suspecting that she has a lover, he insults her. Feeling that de Ryons is the only one who really understands her, Jane tells him that she was the woman on the train bound for Strassburg, to which de Ryons answers that he never

went to Strassburg and that his story was an absolute concoction.

Now de Ryons has brought the situation to a climax worthy of his efforts. He will guide this woman who was about to yield to temptation; he will restore her to her husband. And so, continuing in his rôle of the *ami des femmes*, he asks de Montègre for Jane's indiscreet letter, knowing full well that de Montègre will refuse and will send the letter to de Simerose. He has calculated well, for de Montègre, spiteful in his belief that Jane has turned her affection toward another, sends the letter to her husband. The latter, believing the letter to be written to him, and delighted that Jane is willing to return to him, hastens to find her, and Jane casts herself into his arms.

This play was almost a complete failure. Dumas, in his preface, written in December, 1869, attempting to explain the indifference of the public, states: "You see my crime; I violated tradition. I did not bow before the omnipotence of womankind. I showed her at the discretion of a man who saw through her, incapable as she was to maintain her poise, to direct herself, to save herself, to reëstablish her position without his aid." Dumas discourses at great length on this point, apparently failing, or perhaps refusing, to see that the real reason for his failure was that the play is badly constructed, a fact which he admits in the same preface. Between *Le Fils naturel* and *L'Ami des femmes*, he produced, in 1859, *Un Père prodigue*, which marks a reversion to the play of observation. Perhaps his vision had become blurred; for, in *L'Ami des femmes*, his thesis is totally obscured. If we accept it as a problem-play, the main theme indicates that failure to enlighten a bride before her marriage will invite disaster. If this is the author's reason for writing the play, we, the audience, must search diligently before discovering it; and consequently as a thesis-play, it fails to impress us. If we construe it to be a play of observation, we seek in vain to find, from our own experience, any recollection of such a *milieu* as he depicts; and, if he has invented it, we ask ourselves why he did not invent a more interesting or a more artistic one. The truth is that the comedy is what the author least meant it to be, a play of character; for the play is little more than the rôle of de Ryons. Let us not be misunderstood. The character of de Ryons is admirably drawn, for the excellent reason given by

Sarcey which we have previously mentioned: the author used himself for a model, and de Ryons is a picture of precisely what Dumas would like to be and what he becomes in later plays, the counsellor of women. Reality of a single character, however, cannot atone for unreality of incident. We are by no means convinced of the disinterestedness of de Ryons as he so readily aids a woman in distress; and we are compelled to stretch our imagination unjustifiably to believe that Jane would pour forth to him all of the secrets of her heart.

For three years following the production of *L'Ami des femmes*, Dumas produced no play under his own name. *Le Supplice d'une femme*, 1865, the dual authorship of which we shall discuss in a later chapter, was written with Émile de Girardin; *Héloïse Paranquet*, 1866, owed its initial inspiration to Armand Durantin. In preparing these plays, Dumas had made a discovery; namely, that he could better concentrate the material of a thesis-play by using fewer acts. In *Le Supplice d'une femme*, which was a highly successful play, he reduced the number of acts from five to three;[12] in *Héloïse Paranquet*, he compromised on four acts. From this time until the end of his career, only once, in *L'Étrangère*, did he return again to the five-act play; and this attempt was rather unsuccessful. The years 1865 to 1867 thus constitute a period of experimentation on the part of Dumas subsequent to the failure of *L'Ami des femmes*.

To write his next play, Dumas *fils* felt the need of quiet surroundings. As he writes in his *Notes inédites:* "The lack of welcome given to *L'Ami des femmes* still worried me after having kept me away from the theater for three years."[13] He thus betook himself to Étennemare, above Saint-Valéry-en-Caux, on the coast, and there composed the four acts of *Les Idées de madame Aubray* which had its *première* at the *Gymnase-Dramatique* on March 16, 1867.

Madame Aubray is a woman who consults the dictates of her own conscience rather than the opinions of society. Left a widow

[12] All of his preceding plays had contained five acts. In *Le Fils naturel* we have a prologue and four acts, because of the lapse of time between the prologue and the first act, but it is in reality a five-act play.

[13] *Théâtre complet*, vol. VIII, *Notes inédites*, p. 275.

with an only child, Camille, she rears him in paths of righteousness. An absolute confidence exists between them. It is natural that Barantin, a man of learned pursuits who had driven his wife from his home after having discovered her infidelity, should entrust his daughter Lucienne to the care of Mme Aubray and take up his abode in her home. Mme Aubray invites to her house a young 'widow,' Jeannine, who gives music lessons to support herself and her child Gaston. Won by the affection that Mme Aubray shows her, Jeannine, unwilling to deceive her, tells her frankly that she is unmarried and that the man who seduced her is still alive. Mme Aubray refuses to accept this as sufficient reason for closing her door to Jeannine, renews her welcome to her, and promises to find her employment if she will refuse to accept any further support from the father of Gaston. Hardly has Jeannine left the room when Tellier, the man in question, enters and informs Mme Aubray that Jeannine is not a widow but an unmarried mother, and that she is establishing herself among respectable people whose society she has no right to frequent. Mme Aubray, unaware that Tellier is the father, tells him politely that she believes in pardon, receives whom she pleases, and suggests that he convey the expression of her views to the father of the child.

Mme Aubray continues her rôle of Christian charity and pardon by asking Barantin to forgive his wife her transgressions. Mme Barantin has paid a secret visit to Mme Aubray, asking her to use her influence in obtaining Barantin's permission that she return to him. Barantin refuses categorically, telling Mme Aubray that although he holds her in highest esteem, he believes that her ideas of pardon would undergo modification if either she or her son were victims. Mme Aubray maintains that pardon is not, as Barantin upholds, "indifference to what does not concern one's self," and insists that she would maintain her views even if it were a question of one of her own family.

Little does Mme Aubray realize how soon she will be put to the test. Camille soon confesses to her that he loves Jeannine. He has already asked Jeannine to marry him, but she has refused. Upon his insisting, she has told him to see his mother and that if Mme Aubray consents, then and then only will she agree to marry him. Much to Camille's surprise, his mother refuses to grant her blessing

and explains that Jeannine is not a widow. Still Camille begs her to yield. Mme Aubray admits that since the first mis-step Jeannine has lived an irreproachable life, but even so she cannot favor such a marriage. Finally Jeannine, to solve the situation, makes a desperate resolution. In the presence of all, she affirms that her rôle has been one of duplicity; her first fault was not the only one, and since that time she has committed others, and these not through ignorance but of her own volition. At this statement Mme Aubray can no longer repress the cry of her conscience. "It is not true," she exclaims to Camille; "Marry her!"

In the preface to this play, Dumas states: "Two and two make four; four and four make eight. The theater is just as pitiless as arithmetic. If I did not wish to arrive at this dénouement, or rather at this proof, it was my place not to treat the subject. But I treated the subject precisely to arrive at this dénouement, being only too happy to show the logic of the theater in perfect accord, this time, with the Gospel."[14] No other play of the author better illustrates the carrying into execution of this principle. There is not a single scene, or even a single speech, that does not tend toward the ultimate solution. Every event in the play affects Mme Aubray and brings her to the point of making her final decision. Nowhere has Dumas made logic more triumphant; nowhere has he more effectively forced the public to accept a dénouement which it did not wish to countenance. From the point of view of pure theatrical technique, the play is indisputably a masterpiece.

Chronologically, *Le Filleul de Pompignac*, 1869, is the author's next play; but, inasmuch as it belongs to the group of plays written in collaboration with others, we shall reserve our discussion of it for a future chapter. The next work bearing his own name appeared for the first time at the *Gymnase-Dramatique* on October 10, 1871, under title of *Une Visite de noces*. Containing as it does but one act, it can be summarized in a word. De Cygneroi, with his wife Fernande and their three-months old baby, pay a visit to Lydie de Morancé who had formerly been de Cygneroi's mistress. Here de Cygneroi meets his old friend Lebonnard and attempts to impress him with the fact that marriage has reformed him. Lebonnard, to test the latter's profession of virtue, informs

[14] *Préface, Idées de madame Aubray*, IV, p. 215.

de Cygneroi that he was not the only lover of Lydie; her favors were shared by a Spaniard, by an Englishman, and by Lebonnard himself. Prior to this confession, he instructs Lydie in the rôle which she is to play, and when she meets de Cygneroi she corroborates the statements of Lebonnard, but insists that of these four men de Cygneroi himself was the only one she really loved. Secretly flattered, de Cygneroi proposes to Lydie that he will abandon his wife and child to live with her, and she accepts. Lebonnard thereupon informs him that the story was a complete fabrication and that Lydie never had any other lover. De Cygneroi hastens to leave the house together with his family; for if he is to live with an honorable woman he prefers his wife.

This apparently inconsequential play, which is hardly more than a farce because of the improbability of the situations which it contains, is the dramatist's first treatment of the question of adultery and is the first of a series of three consecutive dramas dealing with this question. Curiously enough, Dumas here passes through a mental transformation quite the reverse of the attitude he takes in regard to the subject of illegitimacy. *Une Visite de noces* is a light, ironical, almost superficial treatment of the question, and comedy is the keynote of the play. In *La Princesse Georges*, produced at the *Gymnase-Dramatique* only two months later on December 2, 1871, tragedy ensues; but the victim is not the person who most deserves to die. In the third play of the series, *La Femme de Claude*, which belongs to the third or symbolistic period of Dumas *fils*, comedy is almost completely eliminated from the play and retribution overtakes the adulteress.

In *La Princesse Georges*, Séverine, familiarly called 'la princesse Georges' by her friends, has discovered the *liaison* of her husband and her friend Sylvanie, comtesse de Terremonde. She accuses her husband of the fact; but he assures her that, although Sylvanie had been his mistress before his marriage, he has now broken relations with her. He asserts that his recent visit to Sylvanie, which Séverine had discovered, was simply for the purpose of coming to an agreement with her and for arranging the return of some letters. Séverine, who deeply loves her husband, believes him and forgives. She soon learns, however, that he has not told the truth. She had, upon her marriage, agreed to his equal right with her to

use the four millions of francs which she possessed. Learning that the Prince has already taken two million francs and that he intends to leave on the morrow with Sylvanie, who is among the guests at the Prince's home, Séverine bids her leave the house and then immediately informs the Count de Terremonde that his wife has a lover. Meanwhile de Fondette, a guileless young man, has fallen prey to the charms of Sylvanie and she has given him a *rendez-vous* for that night at her home. The Count pretends to leave for a trip, dismisses his concierge, and lies in wait for his wife's lover. Séverine, who knows this, tries her utmost to prevent her husband from going to Sylvanie that night. He refuses, leaves her, and goes to the home of Sylvanie, which is separated from the Prince's dwelling by only a garden. A shot is heard, and the Count de Terremonde enters announcing that he has killed his wife's lover. Séverine is about to attack him when the Prince walks in, and she learns that it is de Fondette who has been killed. Neither the Prince nor Séverine utters a word as the curtain falls; but he makes a spontaneous movement to cast himself into his wife's arms, then stops, respectfully, and almost kneels to the ground as he stretches out both hands toward the hand which the Princess extends toward him and of which he does not yet dare take hold.

From the above summary the reader will at once perceive that the purpose of the author is much more serious than in *Une Visite de noces*; and, lest we fail to receive his moral lesson, he takes pains in *Au public*, the preface to the play, to outline his purpose:

> What had I to do and prove? I had to place before you, dear public, the question of the adulterer, a question both as young and as old as the world itself, since it recommences every day and will always recommence. I had while painting the suffering, the temptation, and the struggles of the woman, to show the inadequacy of the law, of the family, and of society in the presence of this daily fact, disastrous and commonplace. I had to call the attention of the legislator, of the philosopher, and of the moralist to this lesson. I had to show to the eyes of the respectable woman the animal that prowls about her home, ready to rob her of her happiness and devour her children. I had to give a bit of advice to this respectable woman.[25]

In this same preface, Dumas *fils* attempts to defend his dénoue-

[25] *Au public*, V, p. 73.

ment. The public, of course, had expected the Prince to be the victim of the Count de Terremonde's pistol shot, and was greatly amazed and rather disappointed to find that the blow had fallen upon a man innocent of any wrong-doing as far as the relations between the Prince and Séverine were concerned. The author goes to some pains to show that the Prince must be saved through pardon and love, and that de Fondette must be the sheep of Abraham's sacrifice, the holocaust of the God of tragedy. Sarcey, on the other hand, claims that it is doubtful whether a dénouement which needs a lawyer to defend it can be a good dénouement. We, in this instance, feel rather inclined to agree with him.

As a thesis-play *La Princesse Georges* is not particularly convincing, and the reason thereof is not difficult to establish. In this instance, logic gives way to poignant emotion, which nowhere in the dramatic work of Dumas *fils* is more fully developed than in the first two acts of this play. Of all the problem-plays, it is perhaps the one most moving and most natural. Cold facts and human emotions are the two elements which the author constantly attempted to resolve into perfect solution: when the facts rose to the surface, the thesis was most apparent, but the play lacked the warmth of life; when human emotions rose to the surface, it was difficult to see below the surface of the mixture and discover the thesis within. In his notes, the author tells us that he had sat down to write *La Femme de Claude* when suddenly the idea of *La Princesse Georges* flashed into his mind, developed scene by scene, and made such an indelible impression on his mind that, instead of beginning the play that he had intended to write, he wrote, within three weeks, *La Princesse Georges.* Here then, to my mind, is the real explanation of the human qualities of the play; for what the author noted down was a picture of real life, before he had attempted to apply the logic of cold reasoning to it and emphasize a thesis.

The last lines of *La Princesse Georges* were penned on the thirteenth of July, 1870, just two days before the declaration of war between France and Prussia. It is doubtless no mere coincidence that *La Femme de Claude*, 1873, and *L'Étrangère*, 1876, reveal to us an entirely different Dumas. These plays, highly symbolistic, mark a divergence from the path usually trod by the author; and

it seems probable that his feelings, outraged by the war, sought an outlet in his work. It is true that *Monsieur Alphonse*, produced for the first time at the *Gymnase-Dramatique* on November 26, 1873, also belongs to this period, and yet it contains none of the exaggerations noticeable in the other two plays. It was, however, as we already know, a play which dealt with a subject which Dumas had previously treated on several occasions, a subject upon which he could now reflect with some serenity of mind.

With *Monsieur Alphonse*, we have the dramatist's final treatment of the *fils naturel*. Octave has violated Raymonde who becomes the mother of a little girl, Adrienne, whose name is written down in the records as of 'father and mother unknown,' and who is entrusted to the care of country folk for her up-bringing. Later Raymonde meets Montaiglin, a sea-captain with a heart of gold. Unable to bring herself to the point of acknowledging what society would term a blot upon her life, she marries him without making a confession. During the ensuing years, she seizes every opportunity to visit her child while her husband is away at sea. Octave, on the other hand, visits Adrienne only on very rare occasions, and is known to her only as Monsieur Alphonse. Finally, he decides to marry Mme Guichard, an uncultured but very worthy woman who has accumulated a tempting fortune. He therefore brings Adrienne to the home of Montaiglin, whom he knows very well, and asks him to have Raymonde take care of his daughter. Montaiglin expresses surprise at learning that Octave has a daughter eleven years old. Octave, however, explains to him that the child is illegitimate, and that if Mme Guichard were to know of its existence she would doubtless break off the contemplated marriage. Inasmuch as Montaiglin is about to leave for a voyage of two years duration, he is happy to accept Adrienne who will be company for Raymonde.

In the meantime, Mme Guichard has become suspicious of several of the actions of her prospective bridegroom. She has followed him and has seen him bring Adrienne to the house. She demands an explanation from Octave, and the latter is forced to confess that Adrienne is his daughter, but insists that the mother has been dead for several years. Mme Guichard, deceived, is still willing to marry Octave, but imposes the condition that Adrienne come to

live with them. Unwilling to have his marriage interfered with, Octave now asks Montaiglin to explain to Raymonde that the plans have been changed. In her interview with her husband, Raymonde so pleads in favor of keeping Adrienne that Montaiglin senses the truth; and Raymonde, consternated and at the same time happy that she has nothing to conceal any longer, seeks refuge in her husband's arms and confesses. To her amazement, he pardons her and agrees to keep the child.

Following his decision, Montaiglin summons a notary and another witness in addition to Octave. He first asks the latter whether he is willing to recognize Adrienne as his daughter. When Octave refuses, Montaiglin himself recognizes the child, and René and Octave sign as witnesses. There remains but one more thing to be accomplished: Mme Guichard must be prevailed upon to give up Adrienne. But here a difficulty is encountered. Mme Guichard, herself an illegitimate child, has become fond of Adrienne, and has pitied her unfortunate social status. She has therefore legally recognized Adrienne as her own daughter. "The Code," she remarks, "is most obliging; it permits those who have children to refuse to recognize them; but it also permits those who haven't any to recognize the children of others." Montaiglin explains to her that her recognition has no legal standing, and that although her intentions have been good, she has committed a falsification.

Although uneducated and uncultured, Mme Guichard is by no means lacking in perspicacity. She perceives that she is being deceived by all hands. In vain does she question each of the interested parties in her attempt to get at the truth of the whole matter. Finally her woman's instinct suggests a plan. She sends Adrienne to get some packages for her and, as she watches the child go out, suddenly exclaims: "Oh! she has fallen; she is all covered with blood!" Unable to suppress her mother instinct, Raymonde utters a cry and rushes to the aid of her daughter, only to find that the child is unhurt and that Mme Guichard has tricked her into an unspoken confession. Turning to Octave, Mme Guichard angrily dismisses him. Then, regaining her composure and her sense of humor, she remarks: "Well, here I am the widow of a husband I have not married and mother of a child who is not mine; that is enough for me. As for you, my little girl, I have frightened

you, but I shall not do so again. I shall love you well, from afar, since you are going away; but we shall see each other again later, when your father is sure that I am a worthy woman."

There are marked differences between this last play, which treats of the illegitimate child, and *Le Fils naturel*, the author's first development of the subject. In *Monsieur Alphonse*, the dramatist has reduced the number of acts from five to three and, instead of a play which covers a span of many years and several localities, has written one in which the three unities are strictly observed. These are, of course, dissimilarities of dramatic procedure. The most striking difference between the two plays, however, is the attitude of the author toward his subject. In *Le Fils naturel*, despite its calm exterior, one notes an undercurrent of indignation. In *Monsieur Alphonse*, on the other hand, no indignation of the author can be detected. Time had soothed the dramatist's anger; he could now, in spite of the seriousness of the problem, see the irony of the situation and put into the mouth of Mme Guichard the words: "For after all I am your mother; the second, the third; at any rate I am one of them and that may be of some use to you at some time."

Monsieur Alphonse has several points of excellence. Its simplicity, its celerity of action, its sparkling dialogue, and its splendid portrayal of character recommend it immediately as a superior play. Here the characters are in no wise "walking arguments" but intensely human beings, and each one of them stands out in clear relief. There is, perhaps, just one defect which becomes conspicuous because the characters are otherwise so excellently drawn. Montaiglin is an exceptionally honorable man, and we might expect from him the utterance of high ideals. He is none the less a sea-captain and not a professor of rhetoric or a poet. When, therefore, he says to Raymonde: "Créature de Dieu, être vivant et pensant qui as failli, qui as souffert, qui te repens, qui aimes et qui implores, où veux-tu que je prenne le droit de te punir?"; when, at the end of the play he exclaims: "O cœur humain, changeant comme la mer, profond comme le ciel, mystérieux comme l'infini!", then do we feel that the author has somewhat distorted his character who, although he might be capable of entertaining such sentiments, would hardly express them in quite so polished and oratorical a form.

To the group of thesis-plays belong, to some extent, other plays written subsequent to the symbolistic period through which Dumas passed, and we shall discuss them as a separate unit later. Let us now, before proceeding to the symbolistic plays, glance back at the preceding dramas which, through the diversity of their content and workmanship, demand a word or two in way of summary.

We have observed that Dumas *fils*, ceasing to be a mere observer of contemporary customs, became a moralist, inaugurating the useful theater. Not claiming that the theater can change the character of an individual, he did, however, seek sympathizers with his own ideas, probably in the hope that reforms might be accomplished gradually, and accepting as his reward the satisfaction that he would have in realizing that he was having some part in any social reformation that might result. All of the plays of this period have a moralistic, predicatory tone, some of them to a marked degree. Continuing in this new field with the traditional play of five acts, he soon discovered that unless he had a very vital subject, excellently handled, he would have to reduce the number of acts to secure greater concentration. After three years of absence from the theater, except for dramas the main idea of which belonged to others and which were not produced under his own name, he returned to the stage with plays which contained no more than four acts and which, in the great majority of cases, had but three. In these plays, logic is distinctly noticeable. Having scored his victory over his public by making it accept, in *Le Fils naturel*, not the dénouement it might desire, but his own logical solution, the outcome demanded by the theme of the play, the author had nothing further to fear on that score. Having captivated his spectators, he was now in a position to preach to them, to counsel them, to console them; and, taking up two basic social themes, adultery and illegitimacy, he showed the inadequacy of the laws then in force, looking forward to further legislation which would ameliorate the conditions of French society.

CHAPTER V

DUMAS THE MYSTIC: THE SYMBOLISTIC DRAMA

ALTHOUGH the attacks in the thesis-plays are trenchant, they are rarely bitter. In *L'Ami des femmes*, Leverdet declares: "Experience and philosophy which do not culminate in indulgence and charity are two acquisitions that are not worth what they cost."[1] Thus, in the thesis-play, pardon is more frequent than vengeance. It is in the third stage of his career, when Dumas *fils* becomes, after the Franco-Prussian War, a symbolist, promenading before our eyes figures whom we might expect to find in the apocalypse, that his acerbity is such that he becomes almost an avenging angel. The Franco-Prussian War was not, of course, the complete cause of this change which was, for a man of his type, a normal one. As René Doumic states: "This phenomenon takes place with even greater intensity in the case of those men whose minds are most active. With them facts turn into ideas. . . . These ideas obsess them, haunt them."[2] Doumic then makes reference to the symbolism of Corneille, Racine, and Shakespeare; and shows how, in the nineteenth century, George Eliot in her later novels, Flaubert in *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, and Zola in *La Bête humaine*, were symbolists. He also points out the fact which many others have stressed, that Ibsen, like Dumas *fils*, passed successively through a romantic, then a realistic, and lastly a symbolistic stage. We have already indicated that the dramatist, at this time, was under the influence of Dr. Favre and that he lost his father in 1870. The Franco-Prussian War was thus, in the case of Dumas, the final gust of wind to set into flame his smouldering symbolism.

Doumic claims that the transformation was taking place in Dumas at about the time of the production of *L'Ami des femmes*, in 1864. It is difficult to say at precisely what moment the change

[1] *Ami des femmes*, Act V, sc. 1, 186. [2] Doumic: *Essais sur le théâtre contemporain*, p. 11.

began to take place, but it seems that we may go back even before that date. In 1859, in *Un Père prodigue*, the comte de la Rivonnière says: "Mais le plus affreux, c'est qu'en voyant de Tournas, *c'est-à-dire le Mal*, croire à cette possibilité, en entendant madame Godefroy, *c'est-à-dire le Bien*, me dire que l'opinion pouvait être du même avis, je me suis demandé avec effroi si les autres ne me connaissaient pas mieux que moi."[3] From this citation, it is quite evident that even at this early date in his career Dumas was beginning to visualize his characters in their symbolical significance. When, in the preface to *La Princesse Georges*, written in 1871, the author declares: "M. de Terremonde, c'est la passion, il tue; la princesse de Birac, c'est l'amour, elle pardonne,"[4] he is well aware of his new transformation.

The first of the two plays characteristic of this third stage of the dramatic development of Dumas *fils* is *La Femme de Claude*, which had its first performance at the *Gymnase-Dramatique* on January 16, 1873; and, lest we fail to realize its true symbolical portent, the author flatly informs us three times of his intentions, in the document which serves as a preface to the play. First, he says: "Do you see that Claude? He is not merely a mechanic, an inventor, a man; he is Man in the full sense of the word, he is the example; he is what you and I ought to be, to-day more than ever."[5] Then again, he declares: "Claude represents conscience."[6] And finally, he tells us: "In that play *La Femme de Claude*, a purely symbolical work . . . , Claude does not kill his wife, the author does not kill a woman, they both kill the Beast."[7] (In the same preface, Dumas defines the Beast as the prostitute, the adulteress, who is, so he believes, undermining French society.)

The play begins with the return of Césarine, Claude's wife, who has been away for some time. She had run away leaving her husband no knowledge of her whereabouts; and, inasmuch as the man with whom she had been on intimate terms disappeared at the same time, it was quite evident that they had gone off together. This infidelity and other nefarious actions of his wife which he has discovered, cause Claude to seek distraction in work. He in-

[3] *Père prodigue*, Act V, sc. 2, 396-397.
[4] *Au public*, V, p. 75.
[5] *A M. Cuvillier-Fleury*, V, p. 204.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 210.
[7] *Ibid.*, p. 219.

vents a cannon of great destructive power. In his task, he is aided by Antonin, a young man whom he had taken into his home when the former was destitute and, educating him and associating him with his work, had made a constant companion of him. Antonin has also developed inventive genius and has perfected a rifle. In his experiments, Claude has exhausted all of his available funds; and, when Césarine returns, he has already put his house on the market for sale. Césarine offers him a sum of 200,000 francs which, she declares, have been left her by her grandmother. Claude, however, knowing his wife, refuses either to believe her story or to accept the money.

Meanwhile a prospective purchaser for the house arrives. He is apparently a Méridonal, for he speaks with a strong marseillais accent. Left alone in the room with Césarine, this man, Cantagnac, soon reveals his true self. He is the secret agent of a foreign country, and has come to gain possession of Claude's invention. Knowing that Claude cannot be bribed, he approaches Césarine, relates in detail all the evil actions of her life, and threatens to bring to the attention of Claude her most recent unpardonable actions, deeds of which her husband remains in ignorance. Césarine promises to aid Cantagnac in getting possession of the invention. In the meantime, she has discovered that Antonin is in love with her; and she seizes this opportunity to bring her plan to maturity. Informing Antonin that her husband will not accept the 200,000 francs, she asks him to put them into safe keeping, knowing that he has the key to a burglar-proof safe which contains the plans of the invention and that Antonin will doubtless deposit the money there. In the meantime, Edmée, a faithful servant whose one fault is a habit of eavesdropping, informs Claude that she has overheard a conversation between Cantagnac and Césarine, and that the former is a secret agent. She also tells him that Césarine is attempting to seduce Antonin.

Unaware that her husband has any knowledge of her real purpose, Césarine now attempts to execute her plan. Pretending to be madly in love with Antonin, she persuades him to run away with her. Inasmuch as they will need funds, she asks him to open the safe to get the money which she has entrusted to his care. As he complies with her request, she seizes the plans and, running to

the back of the stage, attempts to hurl them through the window to Cantagnac who has been waiting in the garden. Antonin, however, grasps her arm, and the papers fall to the floor. Meanwhile Claude has silently entered the room and has witnessed all that has taken place. Seizing the rifle, Antonin's invention, which stands in the corner of the room, he fires upon Césarine, who falls dead; then, without the slightest trace of emotion, he turns to Antonin and says to him: "And you, come back to work."

The influence of the Franco-Prussian War is clearly visible in the play. Cantagnac is, of course, the secret agent of Germany. Dumas was not, however, attempting primarily to write a play of political propaganda, but was using the rôle of Cantagnac merely as an accessory in a play which was to take up again, in much more serious form, the same question of adultery which he had already treated in *Une Visite de noces* and *La Princesse Georges*. To get the full portent of his message, however, one should read the preface to the play which is, in fifty closely printed pages, a letter addressed to M. Cuvillier-Fleury. The latter, editor of *Les Débats*, had written a long article denouncing the play on account of its dénouement. The preface to *La Femme de Claude* is the dramatist's reply to M. Cuvillier-Fleury's attacks, and a defense of his own theories.

To understand Dumas' new attitude of mind, we must go back several years. As we know, he had already decided to write *La Femme de Claude* in 1871, the year in which he wrote *La Princesse Georges* instead. Whether or not he had at that time decided upon a dénouement in which the adulteress is killed, it is impossible to say. In *La Princesse Georges*, as we have observed, the blow falls neither upon the prince de Birac nor upon the comtesse de Terremonde. If Dumas had already, in 1871, visualized a play in which the adulterer or the adulteress would be killed, he evidently had his misgivings about putting it upon the stage. The problem, nevertheless, began to obsess him. In 1872, M. Henri d'Ideville contributed to *Le Soir* an article upon the question: Should an adulteress be killed or pardoned? He had decided in favor of pardon. In June of the same year, Dumas *fils* published through Michel Lévy *frères* a small volume of 177 pages entitled: *L'Homme-Femme, réponse à M. Henri d'Ideville*. On the second

page of this volume, he said: "I have been turning over and over in my mind, for the last four or five years, this same question which will be the basis of my next play, *La Femme de Claude*."[8] After elaborating his discussion through many interesting pages, Dumas declares in the last pages of *L'Homme-Femme:* "She (the adulteress) is not Woman, she is not even *a* woman; she is not within divine conception, she is purely animal; she is the animal woman of the land of Nod, she is the female of Cain;—kill her."

The appearance upon the stage of a play which put this theory into practice caused M. Cuvillier-Fleury to write his article in *Les Débats* soon after the first performances of *La Femme de Claude*. In his article, he attempted to show that Dumas, being neither priest nor judge, but a mere dramatist, had no right to preach his doctrines on the stage, particularly a doctrine which controverted not only the existing laws of France but also the divine law of Christ: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." The preface which Dumas has written in answer to M. Cuvillier-Fleury is a masterpiece of argumentation. He first attempts to show that he has an absolute right to preach upon the stage. M. Cuvillier-Fleury had said: "Who are you? Whom are you attacking? Who has made you a judge and who are the people whom you are judging?" In answer to this, Dumas declares that he assumes unto himself the right to judge. As the proverb indicates: "L'habit ne fait pas le moine." Judges and priests condemned Calas to the torture of the wheel. They had received from society the right on the one hand to judge, on the other hand to dispense charity, but that did not prevent them from condemning an innocent man. Voltaire, a simple man of letters, just like M. Cuvillier-Fleury or Dumas *fils* himself, had received no credentials from society to act as a judge, but he took to himself the right to discuss the decisions of judges and avenged the memory of an innocent man. The French Academy, a body constituted for the purpose of instructing and enlightening the country, of electing men of literary talent, did not admit Molière; but Molière accomplished his work without its authorization.

[8] That the subject and its discussion became of great interest to the public is evident from the fact that the copy of *L'Homme-Femme* which I have in my possession bears the date 1872 and is the thirty-ninth printing of the volume.

Continuing in this vein, Dumas *fils* outlines the story of his own life. He tells how by his birth he became the victim of an unjust law, how he suffered throughout his youth, and how "born of an error he had errors to combat." Becoming the companion of his father, he saw vice rampant in Paris and decided to do his utmost to preach against it, and this had been his policy in many of the plays which he had written before 1873.

It is at this point in his arguments that Dumas shows the beginning of his new symbolistic incarnation. He tells M. Cuvillier-Fleury that, as he was thus experimenting, he saw emerge from his crucible "a colossal Beast with seven heads and ten horns . . . a Beast resembling a leopard with the feet of a bear, the throat of a lion, a Beast clad in purple and scarlet and bedecked with gold and precious stones." Among the blasphemies which the Beast exhaled from its mouth was one word which dominated all others: Prostitution. This Beast, according to Dumas *fils*, was the new incarnation of woman who, having been oppressed by man-made laws, had decided to wreak her revenge. She had found that the Code favors the adulteress, for although a good woman cannot rid herself of a husband who is an adulterer, as in the case of *La Princesse Georges*, neither can an honorable man like Claude rid himself of his wife Césarine unless he takes the law into his own hands.

As he concludes his preface, Dumas indicates that the man-made law of indissolubility of marriage is not, as M. Cuvillier-Fleury assumes, in accord with the divine law. Christ did not, he states, pardon the adulteress. "He drew from her fault an argument against the Pharisees, that is all. If one of the Pharisees, her husband for instance, had been without sin and had emerged from the crowd saying, 'Master, I am without sin,' Jesus would have been forced to say, 'Strike!' "

Prostitution and adultery, according to Dumas, were rapidly devouring France. Germany had made war upon a weakened nation, but France had not taken her lesson to heart; she did not realize that her only salvation was to be found in a modification of her laws, which would accomplish much in the direction of reorganizing society, making woman no longer man's adversary but his helpmate.

Such, then, is the lesson of *La Femme de Claude*. Césarine is the type of woman that, according to Dumas, was devastating France. She represents no individual woman, but the general idea of adultery. Another nation had made her its ally, aiding her in destroying the country in which she lived. The existing laws were powerless to get rid of her; therefore the individual was compelled to act as her judge and execute the sentence.

In spite of its extravagantly symbolistic conception, *La Femme de Claude* is a well-built play. The first act affords an excellent example of the use of the "seeds" of preparation to which we have previously referred. Throughout the entire work, both the characters are interrelated and the situations interwoven with unusual naturalness. In this drama, the author observed strictly the three unities; and, by means of a small cast, by rapidity of action, by clarity of expression, by clean-cut definition of character portrayal, and by brevity, produced a coherent work of great strength. His next symbolistic play, however, *L'Étrangère*, produced for the first time at the *Théâtre-Français* on February 14, 1876, possesses none of the merits of the former drama and, what is most unfortunate, contains similar defects grossly enlarged. How illogical it seems to us to-day that the first appearance of the name of Dumas *fils* on the billboards of the *Théâtre-Français* should be in connection with a play which represents the dramatist at his worst, particularly when many of his earlier plays were well worthy of the character and traditions of that time-honored institution! It is well-nigh impossible to construct a logical summary of the curious mixture of ideas and events of which this singular drama is composed; all that we can hope to do is to give the reader an idea of its content.

The central idea of the play is based upon the *vibrio* theory, which is elucidated in detail by Dr. Rémonin, the *raisonneur*. Vibrios, we learn, are vegetals born of the partial corruption of bodies. Distinguishable only by means of a microscope, they have frequently been mistaken for animals because of their slightly undulating movement. It is their function to corrupt, dissolve, and destroy the healthy parts of the bodies in question. They are the workers of death, and would cause even greater destruction if nature, which is more interested in propagating life than in seeking death, did not intervene. It is at such a point that the human vibrio

drinks too much and falls from a window to the pavement, or, ruined by gambling, kills himself. Then one hears a slight humming sound—it is the soul of the vibrio leaving the body.

In *L'Étrangère,* the vibrio is the duc de Septmonts. Completely ruined both morally and financially, he has married Catherine Mauriceau, the daughter of a bourgeois merchant who has accumulated a fortune of ten millions of francs. At the time of her marriage, Catherine preferred the son of her governess, a young engineer named Gérard. The latter was too timid to dare aspire to the hand of so wealthy a young lady; and M. Mauriceau was most insistent upon her marrying a title. Thus, when the duc de Septmonts appeared as a suitor, M. Mauriceau did not hesitate in his choice.

For three years, Catherine lived the unhappy life of a woman whose husband does not love her and who continues his dissolute ways. She manages to control herself, however, until an incident occurs which strains her forbearance to the breaking point. As she is giving a charity tea in her home, she receives a note from Mistress Clarkson, a woman who had played an important rôle in machinating the marriage of Catherine and the Duke, and who was never received by the ladies of the social circle in which Catherine moved. Mistress Clarkson asks in her letter for the privilege of drinking a cup of tea in Catherine's drawing room and is willing to pay for the privilege the sum of 25,000 francs which are to be given to the charitable cause which Catherine is aiding. Indignant, Catherine sends back a note to Mistress Clarkson stating that she will receive her upon one condition: some male relative or friend of Catherine must show his willingness to accompany Mistress Clarkson. Then, turning to the group of men about her, Catherine asks who will offer his arm to Mistress Clarkson. A long silence ensues, finally broken by the Duke himself who offers to act as Mistress Clarkson's escort. The visit is a very brief one. Mistress Clarkson drinks her tea, gives Catherine a check, and leaves after inviting Catherine to return her visit. As soon as Mistress Clarkson has departed, Catherine throws to the floor the cup from which her unwelcome guest has drunk and tells her servants to fling wide the doors and admit anyone who cares to enter.

At last a solace comes to Catherine in her distress. Gérard comes

to visit her, and although their mutual friend Doctor Rémonin is in the room, Catherine throws herself into Gérard's arms. Naturally, we are greatly surprised; for we should think that after three years Catherine would either have conquered her love for Gérard, or else take greater pains to hide it. The improbability of the scene increases when Doctor Rémonin immediately leaves them to their privacy. Catherine has now so lost all sense of reality and convention as to propose fleeing with Gérard, and he has to help her understand that by so doing she will ruin her own reputation and that of her family.

As the third act begins, we find ourselves in the home of Mistress Clarkson. Catherine, upon the advice of Gérard, comes to return Mistress Clarkson's visit; and, in the course of the interview, Mistress Clarkson relates the story of her life. What a life it is! Truth is often stranger than fiction; but, as the spectator listens to the improbabilities of the recital, he cannot refrain from calling to mind the lurid dime-novels of the cheapest fiction. Mistress Clarkson is impelled to reveal this intimate past because she too loves Gérard and wishes Catherine to give him up. Catherine refuses, and Mistress Clarkson retaliates by advising the Duke to "act as game-warden on his own estate instead of poaching on the grounds of others."

This advice seems to us entirely superfluous. Catherine has by this time informed practically everyone but the Duke of her love for Gérard, and the Duke would indeed be blind were he to fail to notice it. She is even imprudent enough to write an impassioned letter to Gérard which, according to the mailing system of the household, passes through the hands of three different servants before being posted. We should imagine that Catherine would give closer supervision to the delivery of a letter of such a nature, and we fail to share her surprise at learning that the Duke has intercepted and read it. Just at this point, when we might expect violent invectives from the Duke, we are astounded to note that the author makes him take a conciliatory attitude; and it is Catherine who gives vent to her feelings in a lengthy, denunciatory tirade in which she tells the Duke to keep the letter and defies him to do his worst. No sooner has she left him than Gérard enters and challenges the Duke to a duel. Here again our credulity is overtaxed,

for M. Mauriceau agrees to act as Gérard's second. Let us not forget that he had refused to allow his daughter to marry Gérard and had given her hand to Septmonts. Now he takes the part of Gérard against the Duke when everything indicates that the former is Catherine's lover.

The Duke's choice of a second falls upon Mr. Clarkson. Up to the present moment the latter has been kept almost completely in the background, but now he emerges from the shadow as the *deus ex machina* to fulfill the sole function required of him by the author. As the Duke explains to him the cause of the duel, Mr. Clarkson, who until now has been unacquainted with these facts, takes his stand unequivocally on the side of Gérard and accuses the Duke of being an arrant rascal. The Duke, furious, challenges him to a duel to take place after the contemplated duel with Gérard. Mr. Clarkson, however, is an exceedingly practical American. Gérard has already outlined for him a method of washing gold that will save him twenty-five per cent in his business, and Clarkson refuses to run the risk of having Gérard killed. Clarkson therefore insists that the duel between himself and the Duke be given precedence. They meet behind the house; the Duke is killed, and thus the human vibrio is eliminated from society.

From the foregoing summary it may seem to the reader that the play is entirely valueless. To do the dramatist justice, however, we must admit that within the confines of this distorted plot he has at times given evidence of his real talent. Francisque Sarcey has so excellently summarized both the defects and the merits of *L'Étrangère* that we cannot do better, in order to complete the picture of the play for the reader, than to quote the final words of his criticism of the drama:

> Such is this curious play which savors of both high comedy and cheap melodrama, an unbelievable mixture of extravagant fantasies, of strange boldnesses, of shocking vulgarities, and of incomparable passages; where two masterly scenes, that of the introduction of Mistress Clarkson in the first act and that of the discussion with the Yankee in the fifth, stand out against a background of pure inventions which remind one of Ponson du Terrail and of d'Ennery; where, through a confusion of subtle metaphysics, of useless discussions, of unnecessary or ridiculous declamations, there shines forth a group of witty and profound expressions; where, at every moment, in the midst of a wild entanglement, may be discovered

delightful bits of clever stage-setting or of witty observation; an uninteresting comedy and yet one which amuses us from beginning to end; badly constructed, made up of broken fragments, and yet one which does not lose its hold upon us for a single instant; in short, a formless monster, always powerful, and at times charming.[9]

As we look back upon *La Femme de Claude* and *L'Étrangère*, two very dissimilar plays, we note that they have one feature in common: distortion. Dumas the realist was still attempting to observe life under his microscope; but he had turned the screw of his lens too far: blurred, distorted images resulted, except in a few points where projecting features of the objects under examination happened to fall into accidental focus. Happily, Dumas *fils* did not indulge in the extravagances of the symbolistic drama for the remainder of his days and enter into a period of decadence; for his last three plays, which we shall next discuss, mark a return to his former self.

[9] Sarcey: *Quarante ans de théâtre*, V, p. 300.

CHAPTER VI

THE LAST PLAYS OF DUMAS *FILS*

La Princesse de Bagdad; Denise; Francillon

DUMAS *fils* had evidently intended *L'Étrangère* to be his final play; for, excepting *La Comtesse Romani*, which appeared eight months after the production of *L'Étrangère* and which was written in collaboration with Gustave Fould, a period of more than four years elapsed before *La Princesse de Bagdad* appeared on the stage of the *Théâtre-Français*. During this time the author was engaged in writing his *Entr'actes*, the three volumes of which were published in 1878 and 1879. It was in August of this latter year that Dumas *fils* also wrote the preface to *L'Étrangère*. In it, the author speaks freely of the ingratitude of the public, and would have us believe that the public had been unable to keep apace with the evolution of his ideas. One month later, in September 1879, he wrote the dedication of *L'Étrangère:* "To Adolphe de Leuven, the last play of the son to the first and most faithful friend of the father." There seems to be little doubt, therefore, that he did not anticipate any further dramatic writing. For some time, he managed to still the voice within him; but the moment came when he could no longer refrain from putting into dramatic form on paper the drama of *La Princesse de Bagdad* which had for some time been taking shape in the recesses of his brain. Unable to resist longer the dramatic impulse within him, he wrote day and night for one week; for, as he tells us, "I could sleep but little during this veritable attack of fever."

La Princesse de Bagdad had its *première* on the last evening of January, 1881. We can imagine the feelings of the author during the first performance. He had disowned his public several years before, considering it much akin to the spoiled child who does not appreciate the bounties of his father; yet he could not resist the temptation to appeal once more to its sense of gratitude. The reaction of the public was most disheartening; hisses resounded

from all parts of the *Théâtre-Français*, a theater in which such demonstrations were rarely manifested. The second performance fared better: the public listened in a rather cold silence; and the few hisses which occurred only at the end of the play came from the occupants of the cheapest seats. After several more performances, as Dumas himself tells us, "*La Princesse de Bagdad*, greatly shaken as she left port, and standing on beam-ends, at length remained mistress of the sea."

The plot of the play is very simple. Mme Duranton, a Parisian shop-keeper of low morals, had willingly allowed an Oriental prince to seduce her pretty daughter for financial remuneration. A little girl, Lionnette, was born, whereupon the Prince arranged a marriage between the girl he had dishonored and the marquis de Quansas, a ruined nobleman who died soon after giving his name to the mother and infant. For a time, the Prince continued to send lavish gifts of money from his homeland, whither he had returned; and when Jean de Hun finally met Lionnette, now grown to womanhood, the splendor of her surroundings gave little indication of her ignoble origin. She accepted his proposal of marriage without revealing anything of her past, and Jean was most happy in his marriage, for he adored his bride. He attempted to gratify every whim of Lionnette who, by the careless extravagance of her expenditures, soon plunged him heavily into debt. He had married her under the law of common possession of property, and her debts now became his.

The above events precede the rising of the curtain and are revealed to us as the play runs its course. Soon after the play begins, Nourvady, a millionaire, tells Lionnette that he is madly in love with her and has bought her a mansion which will be hers if she will come to visit him there. In it, she will find a chest of gold made particularly for her. He gives her the key to the house. Enraged at his insolence, Lionnette casts the key through the open window into the garden. Several moments later Jean comes to seek an explanation from his wife. He has learned that Nourvady has paid Lionnette's debts. Accusing her of being Nourvady's mistress, he is about to drive her from the house when he realizes that the home belongs to her and that, although her debts are paid, his

are not. He therefore tells her that he will leave immediately and live elsewhere.

The second act takes place in the house which Nourvady has bought for Lionnette. She has gone there not to take up her abode with Nourvady, but to denounce his action of paying her debts. She assures him that she will return to him, as soon as possible, the money which he has given to her creditors. While they are engaged in conversation the police knock at the door. Jean has followed Lionnette; and, now absolutely convinced of her infidelity, has summoned the police. Lionnette, angered that Jean should have so little faith in her, insists to the police that she is Nourvady's mistress in spite of the fact that the latter attempts to exculpate her.

As the third act opens, we learn that Lionnette has decided to leave her husband. Her lawyer, Richard, attempts to dissuade her from fleeing with Nourvady and urges that she should at least see her little boy, Raoul, before her departure. Nourvady arrives. Just as they are about to leave, little Raoul runs in and begs his mother to take him along. She tries to tell him that he cannot accompany them; but he becomes more and more insistent. At length, Nourvady, who has become increasingly impatient, seizes the child by the arm and violently pushes him away. In an instant, Lionnette's mother instinct is aroused and she springs at Nourvady's throat. Richard and Jean rush in; and Lionnette falls at the latter's knees. She swears on the head of Raoul that she is innocent; and the play ends with the happy reconcilation of Jean and Lionnette.

It is at once apparent that *La Princesse de Bagdad* is far removed from the symbolistic plays in which Dumas had previously indulged. The main action is rapid and energetic, and is concentrated upon a very limited number of characters. It manifests, however, a decided leaning toward melodrama. The author has not developed sufficiently the character of Jean de Hun at the beginning to make us accept as plausible his first suspicion of his wife. A man who has been so unsuspicious as to marry Lionnette without investigating her past, who has been so incurious that he has never learned any of these details which are common knowledge to the friends who frequent his own home, a man who is so deeply in love with his wife that he never proffers a word of remonstrance

when she plunges him into debt, is hardly the man who will accuse her of having a lover without giving her a chance to offer a single word of explanation. Once we grant the illogical hypothesis upon which the play is constructed, we can admit that the dramatist has executed an excellent piece of work; but it is difficult for us to fail to observe the flimsiness of the substructure upon which a firm building has been erected, and we are tempted to conclude that there is much ado about nothing. There is also an unfortunate feature about the play which makes us wish that Dumas had kept it from the public. He has frequently been accused of being a writer of immoral plays. Such an accusation is manifestly unjust, for nowhere does he show vice triumphant. Many of his plays, it is true, contain details that other dramatists would prefer not to mention on the stage, or at least not to indicate in a manner so patent. In such plays, however, Dumas surrounds these details with stimulating thought and with true moral preachment; and it is quite evident that these details are utilized toward a good end and are not meant for prurient suggestion. In dealing with *La Princesse de Bagdad*, on the other hand, we cannot see the value of the liberties which the author takes even though we may agree that vulgar appeal was far from his intention. If we must wade through the mire, it should be in order to arrive at a destination worthy of the effort; Dumas might just as easily have created a wholesome past for Lionnette and still have constructed a play which would both move and amuse us.

After the production of *La Princesse de Bagdad*, four more years elapsed before the appearance of Dumas' next play, *Denise*, which was first produced at the *Théâtre-Français* on January 19, 1885. As the following summary will indicate, Dumas now reverts to the thesis-play and produces an excellent piece of work which one must read in its entirety to see the dramatist at his very best.

The Count André de Bardannes, after several years of dissipation, decides to retire definitely to his country estate and lead a regular life. When one of his former mistresses, Mme de Thauzette, recommends Brissot, a man of sterling qualities, as manager of his financial affairs, André immediately employs him, and Brissot comes with his wife and with his daughter Denise to reside with André.

With these people, André lives practically alone; for his sister Marthe has been in a convent, and has indicated that she may later decide to devote her life to the Church. Mme de Thauzette has been paying frequent calls at the convent; for she has an ulterior motive in view. She is the mother of a rather worthless son Fernand whom she hopes to marry to Marthe. She thus avails herself of every opportunity to win the affection of the young girl. Finally, she asks André to consent to the marriage of the young couple; but André, well aware of the reputation of Fernand, refuses. Mme de Thauzette answers: "It is your mistress Denise who is making you oppose the match." André is astonished to learn from Mme de Thauzette that the popular opinion throughout the countryside is that Denise is his mistress. His mental quietude is also greatly disturbed when Mme de Thauzette adds: "And furthermore you are probably not her first lover"; for he has already discovered that he is deeply in love with Denise and has been on the point of proposing for some time.

Marthe is greatly chagrined when she learns of her brother's opposition to her marriage. When she begs him to change his mind he refuses, but informs her that she may return to the convent until she becomes of age, at which time, mistress of her own actions, she may marry Fernand. It happens that, shortly after this interview, Marthe finds herself alone with Denise. She upbraids Denise for interfering with her affairs and for suggesting that Fernand would not make a desirable husband. Denise replies that her sole purpose has been to save Marthe from a miserable future, for she knows Fernand to be unworthy. She adds that as soon as Marthe returns to the convent she will leave the house and seek employment; but that, as long as she remains in the home, she will exert every bit of energy to prevent a catastrophe in Marthe's life.

André, in the meantime, is in a quandary as to what course to pursue. He therefore addresses himself to Thouvenin, the *raisonneur* of the play, and asks his counsel. Thouvenin's advice is most simple: he tells André to ask the truth of Denise; if she has committed a fault she will refuse to marry him; if, on the other hand, she is without sin, she will accept him. Before carrying out this policy, however, André goes directly to Mme de Thauzette and to Fernand. The former denies that Fernand ever seduced Denise;

for she really knows nothing about it. André then agrees to the marriage of Fernand and Marthe, and turning toward Fernand, declares: "Now we are all members of the same family and it is a question of family honor. I love Mlle Brissot and I wish to marry her; it would be a family dishonor if I married a girl of whom you have been the lover. Swear to me that you have never been her lover so that I may go to ask her hand of her father." Naturally Fernand declares Denise innocent, to protect both himself and her. André hastens to obtain the consent of Mme Brissot who betrays deep emotion at André's request but finally utters a very reluctant "yes." Then André seeks Denise; but here a disappointment awaits him, for she tells him that she belongs to the group of women whom one may love but not marry. As André urges her to give adequate reason for her refusal, Denise finally confesses that Fernand had seduced her. At this juncture, Brissot enters and angrily drives Denise from the scene. He apologizes to André for the conduct of his daughter; for he had been kept in complete ignorance of the matter. He further assures André that as soon as he has brought André's financial affairs up-to-date he will leave his employ and take his family with him. As he remains on the stage, Fernand enters. Brissot seizes him by the throat and orders Fernand to go find his mother and tell her to come and ask him for the hand of Denise. "If she is not here within an hour," he declares, "no matter where you are I shall kill you."

In the final act, Thouvenin assures André that he is doing a great wrong in permitting Denise to marry Fernand. In a scene of magnificent argumentation, he shows André that the entire complication emanated from the latter's own actions. Had he not tried to please a former mistress, he would not have taken Brissot into his home, nor would he have permitted Mme de Thauzette to visit Marthe in her convent and urge the marriage with her son. He shows how loyally Denise has acted in the entire matter; for she might easily have concealed the facts. Then Marthe would have married Fernand, Denise would have married André, and the latter would never have learned the truth. Still André remains unconvinced. At this juncture, Marthe, in her youthful innocence, suggests a solution to the problem. Addressing Denise she says: "My brother, who loves you, will not marry you because you have loved

someone else. But I too have already loved another, the same man. We are therefore equally guilty. . . . I want to return to the convent, but I do not wish to go alone. Will you come with me and remain there forever?" Denise, to whom this seems a welcome solution, eagerly agrees. They both are about to leave when André, no longer able to repress his true feelings, calls to Denise to return, and she falls into his arms.

Denise is assuredly one of the best plays of Dumas *fils*. The thesis—Should one make confession before marriage?—is perfectly apparent; and yet it, at no time, overbalances dramatic equilibrium. By observing the three unities, the author constructs a highly concentrated work and succeeds in postponing the dénouement until the final curtain is about to fall. Francisque Sarcey has remarked: "In a play the essential thing is not necessarily the arrangement of a dénouement that has common sense; it is rather to make the public desire the dénouement which you have prepared, whatever it may be, even if it hasn't a particle of common sense."[1] In *Les Idées de madame Aubray*, Dumas *fils* deliberately forced an unwilling public to swallow the bitter potion which he was administering. In *Denise*, on the other hand, he deftly brought his public to the point of crying for his sugar-coated pill.

All of the characteristics of Dumas *fils* at his very best are revealed in *Denise;* and, at the same time, his weaknesses are eliminated or reduced to an absolute minimum. Logic dominates the play, but it never becomes preemptive; for, throughout the entire four acts, the action is highly realistic and true to life. Constructing his characters with high relief and exceptional gradation, the author has presented to us a group of people who belie the nomenclature of "walking arguments" which René Doumic has applied to Dumas' characters in general. It is a well-made play. The first act is a remarkable piece of exposition; and the remaining acts are characterized by vigorous movement, together with the intercalation of scenes of great emotion. Throughout these last acts, Dumas, with the hand of a master, seeks not the line of least resistance to reach his climax; rather does he pile up obstacle upon obstacle for the pure joy of surmounting them and of leading to the final goal

[1] Sarcey: *Quarante ans de théâtre*, p.317.

a breathless public, glowing with the pure joy of the exercise. There is, perhaps, one great store-house that the author did not open in this play; his scintillating wit is conspicuously absent. He has, nevertheless, compensated for this by the interesting quality of the dialogue throughout the entire play. It is a play of uncommon merit, truly Dumasian in every sense of the word. What is particularly astonishing is that the author, at the age of sixty and after a period of apparent decline, should have given us such a perfect piece of work, so full of youth and energy.

The more youthful spirit of Dumas again pervades his last play, *Francillon*, which was first produced at the *Théâtre-Français* on January 17, 1887. Prior to the time at which the play begins, four boon companions, Lucien de Riverolles, Stanislas de Grandredon, Jean de Carillac, and Henri de Symeux, had solemnly vowed never to marry. As usual in such cases, the best laid plans of mice and men go astray. Lucien de Riverolles becomes a deserter from the ranks and marries Francine, or Francillon as the three other anti-benedicts continue to call her after her marriage. Lucien does not, however, renounce his pre-marital escapades. Although his wife is devoted to him and has given birth to a child, Lucien prefers the company of his male companions to the comforts of his own fireside. In vain does Francillon declare: "I love you passionately; I adore the child born of this love; I am a thoroughly respectable woman and my sole idea is to continue to remain so; but since I consider marriage to be a mutual engagement, since we voluntarily swore to one another respect and fidelity, since I have remained faithful to you, and since you have nothing for which to reproach me except for having fulfilled my duty, I give you my word that if I ever learn that you have a mistress, one hour after I become certain of it, I shall have a lover." Lucien refuses to take her seriously and, in spite of her request for him to stay at home with her, leaves her late in the evening to attend the *bal de l'Opéra*. Immediately after his departure, Francine leaves the house, but Élisa, the servant, fearing for the safety of her mistress, bids her husband Célestin follow her.

As Lucien proceeds to the ball and then takes his mistress Rosalie Michon to supper at the *Maison d'Or*, Francine follows him. She accepts the company of a stranger, and they enter the dining cabinet

adjoining the one in which Lucien and Rosalie are supping. The next day she tells her husband what she has done, assuring him that she has given herself to this stranger whose name she does not even know. Enraged, Lucien tries his best to find out who this man may be; but his investigations are fruitless. He finally decides to divorce his wife.[2] He summons his notary; but the latter is busy elsewhere and sends in his place Pinguet, his clerk. Francine is startled at recognizing in Pinguet the man with whom she had gone to the *Maison d'Or*. Although he does not recognize her—for she had worn a mask—she does not attempt to take advantage of his failure to do so, and in a spirit of bravado turns to her husband, telling him that Pinguet is the man for whom he is searching. After Francine withdraws from the scene, Lucien interrogates Pinguet. The latter confesses that he was at the *Maison d'Or* with a lady of social position, but refuses to divulge the outcome of the affair. Finally, Thérèse, a friend of Francine who has at all times maintained her belief in her innocence, suggests a stratagem to disclose the truth. She requests Lucien to hide behind a door and then, as Francine enters, informs her that Pinguet has made a full confession. Francine, whose sense of honor undergoes a feeling of revolt, exclaims: "He lies!" whereupon all of the persons of the play enter upon the stage and the curtain falls upon a scene of mutual reconciliation.

Like *Denise*, this final play of Dumas *fils* is full of youth and animation. We have, it is true, the eternal triangle; but it is what Professor Dargan calls the triangle *plus*, that is, there is not merely one lover (actual or possible), but several. Such an arrangement gives more variety and suspense to the action. Although the plot of *Francillon* revolves about a rather unusual incident, nevertheless it is one of the most realistic of the plays of Dumas; granted the plausibility of the escapade of Francillon, the entire action is exceedingly true to life. Dumas has now abandoned all of the stage tricks of Scribe. Furthermore, he has no axe to grind; and, in the absence of any theory to be demonstrated, he has given up his inexorable logic. All of the pleasure which we derive from *Francillon* emanates from the play itself and not from any exterior motive

[2] Notice that the Naquet divorce law of 1884 is now in force and that this procedure, impossible in the former plays, is now practicable.

of the author. We no longer feel uneasy or guilty under the preaching of a disciplinary sermon; we no longer feel compelled to travel at a pace faster than we wish to assume; we are left to the complete enjoyment of a play for the play itself.

What may be said in way of summary concerning this last group of plays which do not, like the other works of the author, belong to a particular phase of the dramatist's development? They were written not in an attempt to provide a regular contribution to the stage from year to year, but to represent a real inward urgency of expression; for the author was in the necessity neither of writing for financial return nor of enhancing his reputation. They therefore represent the dramatist as his natural self. There is one conspicuous similarity between them: all three are born of actually observed incidents in which Dumas saw dramatic possibilities. Thus, in these plays, interesting situations are developed rather than definite ideas. It is interesting to note that Dumas had written more plausible plays than this trilogy, and yet nowhere more than here was his dramatic technique better evidenced. Here his attention was devoted more perhaps than ever before to the purely well-made play. Youth, energy, swiftness of action, dexterity in dialogue, these are the characteristics which are most conspicuous in the last plays of Dumas *fils* who, even after his sixtieth year, remained a master of stage-craft.

CHAPTER VII

PLAYS WRITTEN IN COLLABORATION: THE THÉÂTRE DES AUTRES

IN 1894, one year before his death, Dumas *fils* published in two volumes entitled *Théâtre des Autres* a group of six plays.[1] These are not works of collaboration in the usual acceptance of the term, inasmuch as Dumas did not work out the material in consultation with fellow dramatists. In most cases, the original manuscripts of the plays had been submitted to Montigny, director of the *Gymnase* theater who, finding in them elements of dramatic value but deeming them unactable in the form in which they were submitted, requested Dumas *fils* to reconstruct them. In all cases, Dumas insisted upon reserving full liberty to make whatever changes he considered essential without consulting the original author. They are thus, in many instances, completely different from the plays originally submitted. The fundamental idea of the play invariably belongs to another, but at times little else remains; ideas are so developed as to follow entirely antithetical processes of reasoning, dénouements are completely changed, sections are omitted, and new scenes are inserted. Dumas thus gives them, among his dramatic offspring, the status of *enfants reconnus*, calling his other plays his *enfants légitimes*.

With the exception of *Le Supplice d'une femme*, these plays in no way add to the glory of Dumas *fils*. As we have already remarked, originality is one of the essentials of his talent; and he suffered an immediate handicap when he undertook to revise the work of another. The results produced are akin to portraits which we might conceive as being begun by amateurish artists and reworked by master painters: in spite of the retouches of the superior workman, the resultant effect is one of incongruity.

We may pass by with a word *Un Mariage dans un chapeau*, the first play in the *Théâtre des Autres*. It is a brisk, one-act farce

[1] *Un Mariage dans un chapeau*, 1859; *Le Supplice d'une femme*, 1865; *Héloïse Paranquet*, 1866; *Le Filleul de Pompignac*, 1869; *Les Danicheff*, 1876; *La Comtesse Romani*, 1876.

to which Dumas could contribute nothing more than his sense of humor and his ability to construct rapid dialogue. Of all the plays of the *Théâtre des Autres*, it represents the sole instance in which the work is actually done in collaboration. Eugène Vivier and Dumas *fils* happened to be guests at the home of M. de Girardin in the month of December, 1858. M. Vivier, who had a widespread reputation as a practical joker, related over the dinner-table one of his most recent perpetrations. It happened that Mme de Girardin was eager to procure a short, humorous play for a future evening party at her home. Dumas *fils* and Vivier, to please their hostess, set to work on the spot to put into dramatic form the farcical escapade of M. Vivier. The little play, finished before midnight, was presented on February 5, 1859, at the *Gymnase* at a benefit performance. Dumas *fils* later sent the manuscript to Labiche, the past-master of this type of play, asking him whether, in his opinion, he should make any further attempts in the same direction. The famous vaudevillist replied—and in this instance he was really serious—that Dumas *fils* should continue the type of drama that he had previously given to the public.

Le Supplice d'une femme, produced for the first time at the *Théâtre-Français* on April 20, 1865, is a play of real merit which does not reveal any incongruities of dual authorship for the simple reason that the theme is one which would have attracted Dumas *fils* immediately had he happened to encounter it before Émile de Girardin, author of the original version. The story of the writing of the two versions and of the subsequent production of the play may be found in the *Entr'Actes* of Dumas *fils* and also in the preface to the edition of the play published by Émile de Girardin. The original manuscript had been offered by M. de Girardin to the *Théâtre-Français*. The reading committee, headed by M. Thierry, returned the play with the usual "regrets." Dumas *fils*, who was present at the reading of the manuscript, quickly perceived that the play contained a subject of superior dramatic value, and suggested that with some revisions it might be put into acceptable shape. Some time later, he returned the manuscript which M. de Girardin had given him to revise, indicating the necessary emendations. The latter, greatly occupied with political problems, suggested that Dumas *fils* himself make the required alterations.

Deeply interested in the subject, Dumas completely revised the work so that it became little else than an entirely new play. Somewhat piqued, M. de Girardin insisted that both manuscripts be read before the committee of the great French theater. The reading of de Girardin's manuscript had proceeded no further than the second act when one of the actors, Régnier, refused to listen further, declaring that he would never appear in such a play. The version submitted by Dumas was next considered and was deemed worth while. M. de Girardin thereupon refused to have anything more to do with the matter, leaving it entirely in the hands of the management of the theater.

When the play—the version of Dumas—was ready for its *première*, M. de Girardin refused to have his name attached to a drama which he declared he had not written. Dumas likewise refused to acknowledge sole authorship. Thus *Le Supplice d'une femme* appeared anonymously, and printed editions of the play have always left in blank the name of the author or authors. As Dumas *fils* states: "It is the only case, I believe, in dramatic annals, of a play having obtained a great success, which no one was willing to sign."

Simplicity and directness characterize the plot of *Le Supplice d'une femme*. The curtain rises to disclose a charming picture of bourgeois family life. It is the birthday of little Jeanne Dumont who is playing with two dolls, one a present from her father and the other from the Spaniard Alvarez, Dumont's business partner. Seven years before, Alvarez had come to the assistance of Dumont in a moment of financial stringency, and since that time the two men had been business associates and firm friends. We are not long, however, in discovering that a storm cloud hangs heavily over this tranquil scene; for Alvarez had captivated the affections of Mathilde Dumont, and Jeanne is his and not Dumont's daughter. For seven years Mathilde has lived in torture, ever fearing the day when a disclosure would have to be made. Throughout this period of time, Alvarez has constantly pleaded with Mathilde to desert her husband; but she has steadfastly refused. At length, Alvarez writes her a letter telling her that their secret has become common gossip and will soon reach the ears of Dumont. He begs her to flee with him. As she falls half unconscious into a chair while reading the letter, Dumont enters. Unable to keep up the mockery

any longer, Mathilde hands him the missive. Thunderstruck by the unexpected catastrophe, Dumont is momentarily nonplussed; but, when he has had time to reflect upon the matter, he summons Alvarez and his wife. Reviewing the possibilities offered both by a duel and by the law courts, he makes evident the futility of attempting such a solution, and substitutes a plan of his own which comes as a complete surprise to the audience. Alvarez must immediately demand from Dumont the sum of money which he has deposited in their business, thereby ruining Dumont. Mathilde must go to live with her parents, giving as an excuse for deserting her husband the reason that she is unable to face a future of poverty-stricken misery. Dumont himself will keep Jeanne. In other words, Dumont condemns his wife and her lover to the stigma of ingratitude, a punishment which shall for many years to come weigh remorselessly upon their consciences.

No other play of Dumas surpasses *Le Supplice d'une femme* in respect to conciseness, clarity, rapidity, and emotion, taken collectively. The entire action takes place within two hours; and the three unities are strictly observed. Dumas *fils* tells us that in order to conceal the authorship of the play he intentionally adopted a telegraphic, rapid, explosive style, avoiding his usual lengthy tirades and suspended sentences. This method of concealing himself was not altogether successful; for Sarcey, among others, asserted from the first that *Le Supplice d'une femme* was the work of Dumas *fils*. On the other hand, the nervous, tense style of the play serves a much better purpose, even though this aim may have been remote from the author's intention—it greatly strengthens the drama; it is to the highest degree compatible with the subject treated; and it gives a much stronger impression of real life than is to be found in many of the dramatist's other works. Concerning this drama, Sarcey states: "The entire play is constructed upon flagrant impossibilities. Yes, but we are not given the time to perceive them."[2] The impression of reality is produced by sheer verbal dexterity, by intense concentration of interest, and by a clever translation of emotion from the speeches and gestures of the actors into the heart of the spectator himself. Two highly emotional scenes cause the action to slacken its vertiginous pace and yet give the spectator but

[2] Sarcey: *Quarante ans de théâtre*, V, p. 348.

little time to catch his breath. The first of these is the scene of confession. Mathilde has fallen into a chair after reading the letter of Alvarez. Dumont enters. He is the happiest of men—he loves his wife and he adores his daughter. It is the latter's birthday, and from the wings come strains of music, for in the other room the children are dancing. Then, with the suddenness of an autumn storm which blights a sunny verdant landscape, comes the revelation, not a revelation of long verbal passages by virtue of which the listener is carried away by the oratorical flights of the author, but a revelation of mute gestures and simplest words. The second capital scene is the one in which Dumont announces his decision. Here again we have intense emotion produced in the heart of the spectator, and curiously enough through cold, relentless logic. With his sentiment dominated by his reason, Dumont outlines to the malefactors the future to which he condemns them. Here also it is not the actual speech of the actor which stirs the heart-strings of the audience, but the situation itself; it is the unexpressed, the connoted, that causes the eyes of the spectator to dim and his heart to throb.

Héloïse Paranquet, first produced at the *Gymnase* on January 20, 1866, is another play which suffered radical alterations. The original manuscript bore the title *Mademoiselle de Breuil* and was the work of Armand Durantin. Dumas *fils* has included the original play in the preface to *Héloïse Paranquet;* and the reader can readily refer to the two versions to see the result of Dumas' "collaboration."

As the curtain rises, Guy de Sableuse is giving a dinner in honor of his promotion to the rank of captain and because he is to depart immediately for Algeria with his regiment. Before leaving, he tells his friend Roland that he has an illegitimate daughter, and asks him to take care of the little girl in case he is killed. Roland expresses surprise that Guy has not recognized the child; but Guy tells him that his father will not sanction his marriage to the working-girl who is the mother. Furthermore, recognizing the child would mean that she would receive only one-third of his fortune; and as the mother's consent would be necessary, it would force the mother, in giving her name to the child, to acknowledge her fault to the world. Thus far, secrecy has been maintained. Roland

promises to watch over the little girl. Then Héloïse, the mother of the child, appears at the dinner and informs Guy that he must either marry her immediately or else treat her as a courtesan and provide her with luxury. He consents to marry her immediately. Cavagnol comes upon the scene; and, in the ensuing conversation between him and Héloïse, we learn that Héloïse is his mistress. Finally, the Count, Guy's father, appears. He offers to pay Héloïse any sum she may desire if she will go away forever; but she refuses and insists upon marrying Guy. The Count then reveals to his son letters between Cavagnol and Héloïse which prove the latter's faithlessness. Guy promptly challenges Cavagnol to a duel.

The second act takes place seventeen years later. We learn that Cavagnol was slightly wounded in the duel, and that the Count permitted Guy to bring up the child in their home, but on condition that the Count should not see her. His love for the child, however, soon prevailed over his prejudices; and now he adores the little girl who is called Camille. They have told the girl that her mother is dead. When Camille grows up she falls in love with Raoul, and this love is reciprocated. Guy frankly reveals to Raoul the story of Camille's birth; but Raoul insists that he is willing to marry her in spite of these facts. Meanwhile, Héloïse has written a letter to Camille, and thus she has discovered for the first time that her mother is still living. Soon Héloïse appears on the scene accompanied by her lawyer Avertin. She tells Guy that she will not permit the marriage and has come to take Camille away with her. The law will uphold her in this; for it demands the consent of the mother for the daughter's marriage.

To avoid Héloïse, Guy takes Camille to Paris. Cavagnol, Héloïse, and Avertin discover their place of refuge and summon the police, accusing Guy with illegal detention of a minor. Héloïse has married Cavagnol, thereby legitimizing Camille. Avertin, realizing that Héloïse and Cavagnol are bankrupt and that Guy has money, reveals to Guy the fact that he has a right to appeal, and the police, recognizing this right, withdraw.

Héloïse, in a conversation with Camille, finds that her mother instinct will not permit her to carry out her evil intentions. She is won over to her daughter just as Cavagnol arrives to say that the appeal has been rejected and that he and Héloïse may take Camille

away with them. Avertin, however, has discovered that Cavagnol fought with the Russian army in the Crimean war without the knowledge of the French minister of war. He then quotes the civil code, articles 2 and 25, stating that Cavagnol has thereby lost his citizenship and also his right to marry. Cavagnol flees in haste, and Héloïse leaves, promising to visit Camille from time to time.

By its detailed discussion of the legal complexities which illegitimacy involves, *Héloïse Paranquet* reminds us immediately of *Le Fils naturel*. The two plays, however, are not on the same plane of excellence from the standpoint of dramatic technique. *Le Fils naturel* is an excellently constructed play which, although it may depict an exceptional case, is thoroughly plausible in all of its details. The plot, which contains many conflicting interests and many situations diverse in nature, is an excellent example of suspense of interest; for we are completely at a loss to conjecture what the final outcome will be. *Héloïse Paranquet*, however, lacks reality, suffering from the fact that the plot is constructed deliberately around the civil code. In both plays, we realize that the author studied carefully the laws governing illegitimacy and made his plays conform with these laws; but, in *Héloïse Paranquet*, this fact is obtrusively apparent. The dénouement of *Le Fils naturel* is admittedly surprising but entirely in keeping with what we might expect from such a character as Jacques Vignot. In *Héloïse Paranquet*, the dénouement is cheaply melodramatic. The entire situation which forms the solution of the play evolves from the fact that Cavagnol is a veteran of the Crimean War, and this external event does not emanate naturally from the main action of the play.

However different in workmanship these two plays may be, their purpose is identical. They portray the unfortunate position in which an illegitimate child is placed, the attitude of the grandparents toward the marriage of the father and mother of the child, and the predicament of the child when he or she contemplates marriage. Innocent themselves of any wrong-doing, these children are denied by law the rights of other children, and society stigmatizes them for a fault which is not theirs.

In *Le Filleul de Pompignac*, which was presented for the first time at the *Gymnase* on May 7, 1869, under the pseudonym of Alphonse de Jalin, and which bears the name of M. François in

the *Théâtre des Autres*, Dumas continues the subject of illegitimacy and adultery.

Mme Lombard and Saint-Élix, cousins, hope to inherit the fortune of Pompignac; but, to their great consternation, the latter suddenly begins to lavish his wealth on his god-son Paul Dornan. The général de Fronteville, friend of Pompignac, is in reality the father of Paul Dornan whose mother died of grief over the adulterous act which she had committed, but confessed to her husband before she died. From that moment, Dornan's character changed and he became embittered toward his son. The general falls in love with Marthe Levoyer, a poor but charming young girl. Paul Dornan leads a dissipated life, and Pompignac and the general continually pay his debts; for they realize that the young man has redeeming qualities and that lack of family solidarity has made him what he is.

M. Dornan reimburses Pompignac for the money which he has advanced to Paul and comes to make a similar settlement with the general. As M. Dornan reveals to the general the difficulties under which he has lived since the confession of his dying wife who had refused to reveal the name of the man who had seduced her, he discovers from the general's attitude that he is the real father of Paul and immediately challenges him to a duel. The general realizes that Dornan is my no means his match in duelling and that a duel will in no way bring a satisfactory solution to the complicated situation. He therefore pretends that his brother, who died ten years ago, was the guilty man, and asks Dornan's pardon in his behalf. He advocates the marriage of Marthe to Paul and, when asked what remains for him, utters the monosyllable: "War."

Le Filleul de Pompignac has at the same time its virtues and its faults. As in the case of *Le Fils naturel*, it represents the development of complicated situations arising from a single event. The reader will need no admonition of the fact that the plot is, to say the least, improbable; but it is only fair to Dumas *fils* to state that once we admit the highly coincidental nature of the interweaving of events, the dramatic structure is well developed. The drama has the misfortune to deserve classification among plays which are neither very good nor very bad. It is a mildly interesting play which one would take pleasure in seeing or reading once. Several

years later, one would have a vague recollection of having either seen or read the play; and nothing more than a few indistinct details would remain in one's memory. In vain does the author make his characters highly argumentative; in vain does he fill his work with philosophical, sententious remarks such as: "Eternal chagrins are the preoccupation of those who have nothing to do;" "We cost dearly only to those who love us, and we love only those who cost us dearly." The reader can do little more than remain politely indifferent.

Two radical departures from Dumas' usual method of procedure mark the last two plays of the *Théâtre des Autres:* first, their foreign setting; and second, the very large number of characters on the stage. The earlier of these plays, *Les Danicheff*, produced for the first time at the *Odéon* on January 8, 1876, under the pseudonym of Pierre Newski, is accredited to M. de Corvin in the edition of the *Théâtre des Autres.*

The countess Danicheff is furious at learning that her son Wladimir desires to marry Anna Ivanowna, a serf whom she has reared almost as her own daughter. She questions her son, and is relieved to learn that so far no word of love has passed between the two young people. She finally agrees that the marriage may take place a year from date provided that Wladimir go immediately to Moscow and for one year frequent the society of the city and become acquainted with girls of noble birth. If, after one year, he still wishes to marry Anna, he may do so. He has scarcely departed when the Countess signs an act freeing Osip, her son's stableman, and Anna, and forces them to marry. Osip really loves Anna; and the latter realizes that, although she does not reciprocate this love, such a marriage is preferable to wedlock with a serf who does not love her.

As the second act begins, we find Wladimir at the home of the princess Lydia Walanoff at Moscow. Among the many characters on the scene is Taldé, a Frenchman, whose life has been saved by Wladimir during a bear hunt. He has been seeking some way of repaying Wladimir. Such an opportunity presents itself when Nikifor, one of Wladimir's servants, informs him of the wedding of Anna and Osip and begs him to impart the news to Wladimir. When the Countess arrives on a visit shortly afterward, Wladimir

upbraids his mother for her falseness, declares that he will never marry Lydia whom the Countess had hoped would be his bride, and departs for the home of Osip threatening to kill Osip, Anna, and himself. As he departs, Lydia swears vengeance.

Osip and Anna are living at the stable of the Countess in a little town near Moscow. Osip has proved a model husband for whom Anna has the highest esteem. She has never been able really to love him, however, and is his wife in name only. Knowing that Wladimir will execute his threat, the Countess takes a short cut to the home of Osip and, arriving before her son, attempts to persuade Osip to go away for a few days. He refuses, and when the Countess threatens him, he reminds her that he is no longer a serf. At this moment, Wladimir arrives; and Anna, involuntarily, almost throws herself into his arms. Requesting the Countess and Anna to withdraw for a few moments, Osip explains to Wladimir that he was forced to marry Anna but that he is willing to give her up in order to repay Wladimir for having saved the life of his father and mother when they were serfs. The Countess, who has been listening behind the door, enters in great delight. She explains that a divorce must be obtained but that in order to procure it Osip must confess that he has committed an evil act. Osip agrees to any plan upon which the Countess may decide.

The Countess entrusts the princess Lydia with the mission of going to Moscow to procure the divorce. Lydia, however, makes no attempt to secure it, and returns with the news that the divorce has been denied. Just when the situation seems to be without a solution, Osip announces that he has learned that a man may be released from his marriage vows if he decides to devote himself to the Church. He promises to do this, and thus Wladimir is free to marry Anna.

Les Danicheff is thus a play of local situation; for its entire fabric is woven about one country at a particular time in its history. If the background is transported from the Russia of the period preceding the liberation of the serfs, the structure of the play collapses, for there is insufficient character portrayal or other true dramatic value to support it. We must observe, nevertheless, that a very large share of our interest centers about this *milieu* which the author has presented most vividly. The play is also of more

than passing interest to us because it almost coincided with the presentation of *L'Étrangère*, which enjoyed its *première* one month later. It is impossible to discover which play was actually completed first, but the similarity between Mistress Clarkson and the comtesse Danicheff is striking. Both are of foreign birth and have spent most of their lives on foreign soil; both are most unusual, melodramatic characters; both consider maintenance of social position more important than the happiness of their fellowmen; both are of implacable natures and thoroughly unscrupulous, even in dealings with members of their own families.

As in the case of *Héloïse Paranquet*, it is a fortuitous event that decides the action of the play; for an item of Russian law of which we have been kept in complete ignorance permits the divorce of Osip and Anna. In the preface to *Héloïse Paranquet*, Dumas *fils* states: "I recommend to my young fellow-dramatists never to end a play which has the pretension of reproducing a phase of real life by the intervention of chance. A dénouement must always be the mathematical result of the circumstances, the passions, and the characters introduced and developed in the course of the action."[8] Yet both in *Héloïse Paranquet* and in *Les Danicheff*, he directly violates his own precepts. We indicate these two instances of inconsistency on the part of Dumas *fils* not because they give evidence of customary irregularity on his part, but for the reason that they are conspicuous because of their rarity.

La Comtesse Romani, produced for the first time at the *Gymnase* on November 16, 1876, under the pseudonym of Gustave de Jalin, owed its original inspiration to Gustave Fould and, like *Les Danicheff*, has a foreign setting; for the action takes place in Florence of the nineteenth century. The comtesse Romani, daughter of a gypsy mother who scarcely knew the father's name, sold into infamy at the age of fifteen by this same mother, had spent her childhood in the squalid streets of Amalfi. Picked up by an itinerant theatrical troupe after her mother's death, she had developed dramatic talent until at length she became an actress of stellar rank. When the comte Romani sought her hand, she accepted on condition that he never question her concerning her past. In spite of the objections of his mother, Romani consented to these terms

[8] Page 115.

and so lavished gifts upon his bride that his fortune was soon completely undermined. As the play opens, the Countess is about to give a performance in her own home and has summoned a large group of stage-folk to judge her acting. She is highly successful in the interpretation of her rôle and decides to accept the offer of the director of the new play to appear in it. As the last rehearsals are under way, a defamatory article appears in the newspaper. Although fictitious names are used, the article clearly indicates that since her marriage the Countess has been the mistress of the baron de Nuzzi. Romani demands of his wife an explanation; and she confesses that the accusation is entirely true. Romani, estranged from his mother and ruined financially, stabs himself upon hearing this avowal. He recovers, however, and his wife, horror-stricken at what her infamous actions have wrought, is deeply repentant. Realizing that her husband still loves her, and yet fearful that her ignominious past will still retain its hold upon her in the future, she decides to kill herself. In a conversation with Toffolo, the dramatic director, she attempts to make a disposition of her possessions without his learning of her decision; but he surmises the truth and convinces her that her only chance for happiness is for her to return to the stage.

Upon so slender and unattractive a theme, Dumas *fils* has constructed a most curious and rather ineffective drama. Fully half of the play elapses before we perceive a single indication of anything resembling the talent of Dumas. During this lengthy preamble, the action remains well-nigh static, the interest of the audience being sustained merely by the glamor of the theatrical life which is depicted upon the stage; for we are initiated into the every-day conversation of actors and actresses, their whims, their attitude toward their art, and their theories concerning their profession. Then, in a moment, the nature of the play changes and our interest is concentrated upon the Count and the Countess; for all but a very few of the thirty-one characters of the play retire from the scene. Rapid action ensues, emotional scenes bring the drama to a speedy dénouement, and the curtain falls upon a breathless but somewhat bewildered audience.

As the reader will immediately observe, it would be a futile task

to attempt any summary of the curiously disparate plays which constitute the *Théâtre des Autres*. We have given them a brief survey at this point for the reason that they represent a part of the work of Dumas *fils* that is usually entirely ignored by critic and reader alike, and which deserves at least passing mention in any study of the dramatist which aims at comprehensiveness.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DRAMATIC THEORIES OF DUMAS *FILS*

NO dramatic writer of the nineteenth century entered into intimate conversation with his public concerning his art with more freedom than did Alexandre Dumas *fils*. It is thus most interesting to be able to take this author at his word, read his dramatic conceptions, and investigate to what extent he succeeded in putting into practice the theories of which he was an ardent advocate. It is in his prefaces that Dumas elaborates his theories both upon dramatic art and upon social questions. Inasmuch as these prefaces form a unique phase of the dramatist's work, it will be well to pause for a moment and examine them.

The value of the prefaces, however, has been disputed. In a general study of the works of Dumas *fils* contained in his *Quarante ans de théâtre*, Francisque Sarcey terminates his article as follows: "One last word: Dumas has written many prefaces and apologues. One should read them because they are amusing and because they have that gift of movement which is the prime quality of the dramatic author; but one must also distrust them if one wishes to obtain an exact and true knowledge of the work itself." Although there is an element of truth in Sarcey's statement, it is, on the whole, decidedly misleading. It is true that certain prefaces of Dumas *fils* diverge widely from the content of the individual plays which they accompany; but they are other than amusing. To the student of the French drama of the nineteenth century, they have an inestimable value. The plays of Dumas *fils* are happily of such diverse nature that they produce a fair representation of the character of their versatile and curiously interesting author. We find in the prefaces, however, additional strokes which lend color and relief to the portrait of Dumas *fils* and to the picture of the French theater during a period of thirty-five years. They throw sidelights on the character of the author himself, on the attitude and whims of the theater-going public of his day, and on stage production in general. They correct erroneous impressions which might arise from attempting to interpret the plays from our own individual-

istic standpoint. They present a host of ideas which never find development within the narrow confines of the drama; or, on the other hand, they elucidate, develop, and expound ideas which appear in rather limited form within the plays. If we please ourselves with the fanciful conception that one of the plays of Dumas represents, through the brilliance of an idea expressed, a lustrous jewel, we may well visualize the author, in his prefaces, as the connoisseur of precious stones, who turns the diamond to all direct and reflected lights, permitting the stone to radiate from each facet the brilliance and fire contained within.

Critics have freely upbraided Dumas for a style in his plays which they term unliterary; but we have yet to find a critic rash enough to brand the prefaces with the same stigma. Accepting them as a whole for what they ostensibly are, examples of argumentation and defense, we must marvel at their breadth of content, their clarity, their wit, their interest, and their style. They are not the impulsive rantings of a warped mind; they are never abusive in tone. They are, on the other hand, the calm, sane, but incisive and forceful responses of a lofty intelligence which feels itself misunderstood. In them, Dumas *fils* reveals two characteristics which are generally evident throughout his plays: keenness of observation and a particularly facile power of analogy.

If we are to study the prefaces of Dumas *fils* as literary documents, we must naturally examine their authenticity, that is to say, in the present instance, their sincerity. It is perhaps useless to insist upon a fact that every one will accept without contention; namely, that the ideas expressed by Dumas *fils* are sincere. Critics are conspicuously concurrent upon this point.[1] Dumas *fils* himself, apparently desirous of putting the matter beyond all doubt, insists upon his sincerity both in his prefaces and in his plays. In *Au public*, which serves as a preface to *La Princesse Georges*, he declares: "To emit an idea, to formulate a theory, to uphold an opinion before the public, whether one speaks from a pulpit, public plat-

[1] Doumic: *Portraits d'écrivains*, p. 14: "But M. Dumas is a man of convictions. His sincerity and good faith are indisputable." Guillemot: *L'Évolution de l'idée dramatique*, p. 227: ". . . but he is sincere, and if his convictions may suffer change, they are indeed his own . . . at the hour at which he expresses them." Weiss: *Le Théâtre et les mœurs*, p. 178: "The frank accent of honesty is again what is best befitting him."

form, or stage, seem to me so serious a thing that my mind—I might even say my conscience—has no rest until I have fully assured myself that I have acted with absolute sincerity and have truly stated what I believed to be true. I do not claim that I do not make mistakes; but I have the firm desire of not deceiving anybody."[2] In substantiation of the same idea we find the following passages in other prefaces: "The first condition for genius is sincerity."[3] "What no one can take away from me is the pleasure that work has afforded me and also the pure delight derived from the conception and execution of these works, good or bad as they may be, but always sincere."[4] "What consoles me is my certainty of never having written what I did not believe. . . . If I have made stupid remarks I have no excuses to offer, having said only what I meant."[5] Dumas *fils* carries his cult of sincerity even into his plays; for de Cygneroi, who the author admits is his spokesman, says in *Une Visite de noces:* "My good friend, I may have only one merit, but at least I have that. I am sincere; I have neither pride nor preconceived prejudice; what I feel I confess."[6]

We have dwelt at some length upon the importance of the prefaces; let us consider, for a moment, exactly what their purpose is. We must bear in mind the fact that the prefaces were not written as a foreword to the plays at the time of their production. Dumas composed them sometimes shortly after the appearance of the plays, sometimes many years later, when he was in a position to sense the reaction of his drama both upon the public and upon contemporary critics. We have already indicated that Dumas was instituting innovations in the French theater and was breaking away from the traditions of the romantic school so fervently adopted by his father and also by Victor Hugo. Although germs of dissension had long since been sown, the bourgeoning of realism in the French theater came as a shock to the public and to literary critics; and their initial impulse was naturally one of rebellion. At first, our dramatist was confronted with the task of defending his new form of literary art; and later, he felt com-

[2] *Au public,* V, p. 76.
[3] *Avant-propos, Demi-Monde,* II, p. 20.
[4] *Notes de la Princesse de Bagdad,* VII, pp. 96-97.
[5] *A Henri Lavoix,* I, p. 394.
[6] *Visite de noces,* sc. 3, 35.

pelled to uphold his attacks upon the morality of his own period. To-day the low moral level of France under the Second Empire is no secret, but in the years preceding 1870 Dumas *fils* was attacking actual offenders; and it is disconcerting to have some one hold up a mirror to one's own shortcomings.[7] Generous acknowledgment of mistakes of judgment, or of ordinary and natural errors, is a virtue by no means rare; but examples of open confession of one's own immoral conduct are more difficult to find. The French public and theatrical critics denied the allegations of Dumas *fils*, demanding further proof of the hypotheses set forth in his plays; and the dramatist retorted in his prefaces.

A secondary purpose, but by no means an unimportant one, manifests itself in the prefaces. We should realize that Dumas addressed his plays not only to the public of his day but also to the reader of contemporary and future generations. From this point of view, dramas should be written to be read: "A dramatic work should always be written as if it were only to be read. The play which one does not desire to read without having seen it, or reread after having once read it, is dead, even though it have two thousand subsequent performances."[8] Dumas further insists that the future fame of a dramatist is largely dependent upon the readability of his plays: "Those of us who hope to live in the future have not only to interest the collective public, but also to win the individual public, the solitary reader."[9] "The work that one reads is a work that is durable; the work that one rereads is a work that remains."[10] Yet Dumas feels that the isolated reader, deprived of stage settings and the skill of the actors, may fail to obtain the full force of his teaching, particularly in the thesis-play, and so he keeps this person in mind when he writes his prefaces: "The reader wishes to be convinced. He no longer has before him the stage-settings, or costumes, or attractive actress, or skillful comedian; he has only the soul of the poet in communication with his own soul. If communication is not established immediately, he casts aside the book. . . . When I come to the reader, I give him the rest, the very

[7] Dumas *fils* realized this as may be seen from the following: "La Rochefoucauld said: 'There are two things that man cannot look at in the face, the sun and death.' He might have said that there are three and have added truth."—*Notes inédites*, VIII, p. 218.

[8] *Préface, Père prodigue*, III, p. 212.

[9] *Au public*, V, p. 76.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 77.

bottom of my thought, which the laws of the theater do not always permit me to utter in its entirety."[11]

Thus, in a word, the purpose of the prefaces is three-fold: to set forth the ideas of Dumas on questions of general interest, to justify the author when attacked, and to develop more fully for the reader thoughts which are restricted by the necessities of dramatic technique. Is it not evident, then, in view of the importance and of the purpose of these prefaces, that they must assume a large place, both in the present chapter which deals with Dumas' dramatic theories, and in subsequent chapters which deal with the dramatist's ideas upon social questions?

In speaking of the drama, first and foremost Dumas considers his public, making frequent references to its youthful nature and considering it a child whose whims must not be entirely disregarded. "The theater," he tells us, "is like love; it demands good humor, health, power, and youth."[12] "The crowd is like a beautiful girl; it is always young and wishes to retain its youth. It wishes to be captivated, charmed, carried away, amused, conquered, seduced, and even violated."[13] Taking into consideration this fact that the public is youthful in nature, Dumas introduces very few old people into his plays. A census of his characters will show that only one is definitely known to be over fifty years of age. This character is Godler, in *La Princesse de Bagdad,* who acknowledges that he is sixty-six years old; but Trévélé, in the same play, hastens to assure Godler that he really looks much younger. The marquis de Thonnerins, in *Le Demi-Monde,* is usually represented on the stage as a white-haired man; but the text of the play gives us no positive method of judging his real age. Indeed, Dumas seems fearful of allowing us to see very much of him; for the marquis appears in only one scene and is promptly whisked from the stage never to appear again. The dramatist greatly prefers younger people, and even in plays of a more serious nature young children are entrusted with important rôles.

It is, of course, the natural desire of every dramatist to fill the theater; and Dumas constantly shows concern over the question of captivating the multitude. "Once again," he states, "it is a ques-

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 78.
[12] *Préface, Étrangère,* VI, pp. 220-221.
[13] *Ibid.*, pp. 221-222.

tion of attracting the crowd. I want to see it arrive in great floods, like a river agitated into waves by the wind. I wish the public to arrive in full day-light, before four o'clock, and besiege the doors in its attempt to obtain tickets, even at the risk of individuals breaking their necks as in famine time at the doors of the bake-shops."[14]

Toward the end of the second phase of his dramatic career, after having written a series of problem-plays, Dumas began to manifest increased concern over the manner in which he might continue to attract his audience:

> Such is the public, such it has been, and such it will be eternally: a child ignorant and unwilling to learn anything; curious and convinced that there are many things which are very natural and very true, but of which one must never speak on the stage; impressionable and distraught, sensitive and inclined to teasing, ready to weep, ready to cry, having a horror for reflection; delighted with a new plaything which makes it immediately forget its former baubles but which it is always ready to break to see what is inside of it, and, not knowing exactly who is the donor, willing to listen to serious things, but on the condition that they be of short duration, otherwise it begins to chatter, yawn, or sleep, or even quit the theater; a child which can never grow old because it has assimilated unto itself the principle of eternal youth, of eternal love, of the eternal ideal, the eternal feminine, in other words that which is always closed to reasoning and open to an emotion. An attempt to change the public is equivalent to an attempt to take the salt out of the sea.[15]

When Dumas wrote: "In order that the dramatist be able to instruct and moralize these masses by revealing the truths of which they are ignorant, he must first of all attract these masses and hold their attention,"[16] he evidently found this childish public growing restless over his thesis-plays, "having a horror for reflection," the very thing which his plays had demanded. Realizing, as he states, that the dramatist might as well attempt to take the salt from the ocean as to endeavor to alter the character of his audience, he de-

[14] *Préface, Étrangère,* VI, p. 197. This conception is taken from the prologue of Goethe's Faust where the Direktor declares:

Denn freilich mag ich gern die Menge sehen,
Wenn sich der Strom nach unsrer Bude drängt
Und mit gewaltig wiederholten Wehen
Sich durch die enge Gnadenpforte zwängt,
Bei hellem Tage, schon vor Vieren,
Mit Stössen sich bis an die Kasse sicht
Und, wie in Hungersnoth um Brot an Bäckerthüren,
Um ein Billet sich fast die Hälse bricht.

[15] *Préface, Étrangère,* VI., pp. 199-200.

[16] *Ibid.,* p. 196.

cided that the change must come from himself: "To content men is too difficult; try merely to move them, no matter in what manner, whether through pain or through pleasure."[17] Unwilling, however, to renounce his conceptions of reform and finding his public "always closed to reasoning and always open to emotion," he turned to symbolistic plays of the type of *L'Étrangère* and *La Femme de Claude,* with the rather dubious results which we have previously noted. In changing the character of his plays to suit, as he imagined, the demands of his audience, Dumas *fils* drifted farther and farther from a theory which he had earlier expressed: "Dramatic works are written not only for those who come to the theater; they are written also, and particularly, for those who do not come there."[18] For this reason, in addition to the reasons cited in a previous chapter, it is highly doubtful that the plays of the third stage of the career of Dumas *fils* will ever enjoy rebirth; and the author himself gave evidence of misgivings in this respect when he wrote: "Indeed, in order that we may write masterpieces we need a collaborator which will survive us: Time. Not one of us knows when he dies whether he has constructed a solid piece of work. Posterity alone has the right of judging and deciding upon what is to live."[19]

To turn from a consideration of the opinions of Dumas *fils* concerning his public, let us now cast a glance upon his ideas concerning the drama itself. Logic is, according to Dumas *fils*, the most essential requisite for the successful dramatist: "The first of these qualities, the most indispensable, that which dominates and commands, is logic, a term which includes good sense and clearness. . . . Logic must be implacable between the point of departure and the ultimate goal which it must never lose from view in the development of the idea or the fact."[20] Although logic evidences itself in the speeches of M. Duval in *La Dame aux camélias,* this first play of Dumas lives by its emotional qualities rather than by its rationality. The development of logic in succeeding plays was very rapid, reaching its culmination in the thesis-dramas. How admirably does Jacques, in *Le Fils naturel,* echo the feelings and

[17] *Ibid.,* p. 199. (Citation from *Faust.*)
[18] *Au public,* V, p. 76.
[19] *Préface, Étrangère,* VI, p. 214.
[20] *Préface, Père prodigue,* III, pp. 210-211.

opinions of the author himself when he declares: "No, I prefer the age at which I now am, the age at which I feel, see, and understand, the age at which my disappointment has a cause and my joy a reason. . . . When a child, arrived at the plenitude of his strength, at the maturity of his reason, correctly evaluates the great sensations of his mind and heart, why should he look back longingly upon a period of ignorance, of weakness, when nothing had any hold upon him, neither joy nor sorrow? No, believe this well, a man begins to live only when he begins to understand."[21]

Logic and clever reasoning characterize practically every play of Dumas *fils;* but, although the element of "good sense" is ever apparent, the element of "clearness" is frequently neglected. We have already criticized *L'Ami des femmes* as a play which is ill-proportioned and lacking in clearness, a fact which the author himself observed.[22] In this play, Leverdet has an unimportant rôle; but his character is very well defined. The exact reverse is true of Mme Leverdet. Chantrin, who has a rôle of only a few lines in the second scene of the second act is suddenly disclosed, in the third scene of the fifth act, after we have almost completely forgotten him, as the man with whom Balbine has fallen in love. Clearness is likewise lacking in the treatment of the situation of the child whom de Simerose wishes to rear. We do not know whether this child is his own, or whether de Simerose is really charitable in wishing to provide for the child's future. We feel that the dramatist should enlighten us upon this point; for it is this fact which greatly influences the resuscitation of Jane's love for de Simerose.

Nor is the dénouement of *L'Ami des femmes* at all clear. The thesis of the play postulates the necessity of enlightening a young girl upon married life before she reaches the altar. Ordinarily, the young and innocent woman, disgusted with the exigencies of married life, repulses her husband and they drift apart. Later, feeling a need of love, she no longer remains true to her husband. Usually no reconciliation is possible between husband and wife. In *L'Ami des femmes*, de Ryons is a highly interesting character;

[21] *Fils naturel*, Act I, sc. 1, 71-72.

[22] *Préface, Ami des femmes*, IV, p. 7: ". . . *L'Ami des femmes* était une pièce mal faite, en certaines parties. Elle manquait de proportion, d'équilibre, et surtout de clarté."

but he is poorly chosen to demonstrate the thesis of the play. He says: "I am the friend of women who have had a lover." But Mme de Simerose has not had a lover. Furthermore, the lesson of the drama indicates that ignorance of girls upon married life leads to deplorable catastrophes. But Mme de Simerose remains faithful until the final curtain, when she falls into her husband's arms. The author pulls her back from the edge of the precipice and the catastrophe is avoided. From the point of view of the thesis of the play, this is a fault in technique; whereas the dénouement in *La Femme de Claude* is logical, for Claude kills Césarine. It is a shocking and a terrible ending; but it is necessary to demonstrate the author's point.[23] If the thesis is to show the destructive results of a social evil, we must have results; and if ignorance of young women concerning married life is to entail disaster, we must, to prove the point, effectuate the disaster. As a thesis-play, *L'Ami des femmes*, with its happy ending, fails completely.

Next, Dumas tells us that for good results the dramatist "must continually put before the eyes of the spectator the phase of the person or of the thing for which or against which he means to direct his conclusions."[24] Despite its many weaknesses, *La Femme de Claude* offers an excellent example of the manner in which Dumas builds up his characters. Césarine is a causer of trouble (Act I, sc. 1, 226); she is destructive (Act I, sc. 1, 231); she is suspicious of her exceptionally honorable husband (Act I, sc. 1, 233); she exhales a sinister influence (Act I, sc. 1, 237); she is a vampire (Act I, sc. 2, 239); she is again destructive (Act I, sc. 3, 244); she smiles as she dishonors or kills (Act I, sc. 3, 247); she has been the mistress of de Luceny (Act I, sc. 6, 263); she has married Claude without confessing her fault (Act I, sc. 6, 264); she lacks maternal instinct, for she has visited her illegitimate child only twice in three years even though her husband had given her his full consent so to do (Act I, sc. 6, 265); she accepted 200,000 francs from her lover, pretending that it was a bequest from her

[23] In this connection Bourget considers *La Femme de Claude* one of the finest dramas of Dumas. Bourget, *Nouveaux essais de psychologie contemporaine*, p. 41: "He has depicted the wild struggle of male and female in prostitution and adultery. He now shows it in marriage and writes *La Femme de Claude*, one of his finest dramas in which his genius has shown itself most boldly."

[24] *Préface, Père prodigue*, III, p. 211.

grandmother (Act I, sc. 6, 267). All of these facts, it will be noticed, are developed in the first act which naturally includes most of the exposition. Meanwhile, in direct contrast with the character of the wife, Dumas works out, through the same act, the character of the husband, Claude. Claude is a genius as an inventor (Act I, sc. 1, 231); he sacrifices his own money for his patriotic invention (Act I, sc. 1, 232); he does not criticize his wife's departure (Act I, sc. 1, 233); he is an upright man (Act I, sc. 1, 233); he is generous and charitable (Act I, sc. 3, 242); he is no dupe, for he immediately sees that Antonin is in love with his wife (Act I, sc. 3, 243); he is unhappy (Act I, sc. 3, 244); he suppresses his true love for Rebecca because he is married and honorable (Act I, sc. 3, 246); he will not defame his wicked wife (Act I, sc. 3, 247); he is of a confiding nature (Act I, sc. 3, 247); he is hospitable (Act I, sc. 5, 259); he forgave Césarine her first fault (Act I, sc. 6, 265). This first act of *La Femme de Claude* is a masterly piece of dramatic workmanship which immediately recalls to mind the first act of *Le Misanthrope* of Molière, in which the seventeenth-century dramatist builds up the character of Alceste in his dialogue with Philinte.

For building up situations, Dumas employs a method similar to that used for building up characterization. In *Le Supplice d'une femme*, we do not know for some time that Mathilde has been the mistress of Alvarez, or that Jeanne is their daughter. When, however, we arrive at the situation which discloses these facts, we realize that Dumas has carefully prepared us for it. The author gave us indications of it in Mathilde's unwillingness to take her child with her on her trip (Act I, sc. 3, 46); and it is now evident that she wished to make the journey in order to be rid of Alvarez. Dumas made further preparations for the situation by Dumont's suggestion that Mathilde is somewhat too severe in her attitude toward the child (Act I, sc. 3, 47); by the fact that Alvarez asks little Jeanne whether she loves her father more than she loves him (Act I, sc. 6, 52); by the statement that Jeanne resembles Alvarez (Act I, sc. 6, 54).

Thirdly, Dumas *fils* is concerned with what he calls the "science of the *contre-parties*, that is to say the science of blacks, of shadows, of oppositions in a word, which constitute equilibrium, ensemble,

and harmony."[25] That Dumas considers love of contrast to be a distinctive trait of French character is evidenced by the fact that in *Les Danicheff* Taldé, a Frenchman, notes that Russian life is characterized by contrasts; it is this above all else that strikes his eye during his sojourn in Russia:

> Taldé: Meanwhile, what strikes me and what makes up the charm of your country are its contrasts. . . . Out of doors, twelve below zero; in here, a corner of the tropics. Out of doors, Siberia; within the house, Sumatra or Java! In the streets we see people, dressed in the latest style of Paris or London, who rub elbows with your compatriots the moujiks, wrapped in their picturesque lambskins. Carriages harnessed in the purest English style roll along next to your national equipage the drosky, a sort of torture of the Middle Ages.[26]

Contrast is ever present in the plays of Dumas *fils* and lends great charm and vigor to his productions. It constitutes so vital an element of his dramatic technique that we shall postpone our discussion of it to the next chapter which deals more specifically with the author's methods of workmanship than with his general theories.

Continuing his discussion of dramatic theories, Dumas next demands of genuine dramatic art "concision and rapidity, which do not permit the listener to become distracted, to reflect, or inwardly to attempt discussion with the author."[27] "Movement, in everything, movement."[28] Rapid movement characterizes most of the plays of Dumas *fils*. The action, a trifle hesitant perhaps in the early plays, becomes greatly accelerated in *La Question d'argent* and in the succeeding dramas as we might well expect; for it is precisely in the problem-play that the public must not find time to discuss with itself the validity of the hypotheses of the dramatist. Indeed, so admirably did Dumas succeed in some instances in imparting vertiginous speed to the movement of events, as in the case of *Le Supplice d'une femme* which we have already cited, that he rendered inconspicuous the most glaring improbabilities. Although his chief objections to the drama of the naturalistic school were based upon the question of how closely one might render real life, it is quite apparent that the lack of movement of the naturalistic

[25] *Préface, Père prodigue,* III, p. 211.
[26] *Act II, sc. 3, 183.*
[27] *Préface, Père prodigue,* III, p. 211.
[28] *Préface, Étrangère,* VI, p. 198. (Citation from *Faust.*)

drama must have been abhorrent to him; for the type of play which depicts "a slice of life" and which is well-nigh static, would seem to a man of Dumas' dynamic temperament a perversion of dramatic art.

In addition to rapidity, a further dramatic requisite is skill in arrangement of characters, "the knowledge of stage-divisions, which does not permit the figure which should be in full light to recede to the rear of the stage, nor the half-tone figures to advance into the full glare of the foot-lights."[29] In many plays, Dumas was highly successful in putting this theory into practice. In pursuance thereof, however, he occasionally defeated his own purpose. Thus, in *L'Ami des femmes*, he was so eager to emphasize the function of de Ryons, the *ami des femmes*, that he forgot that turning the spot-light full upon one character might leave the other characters in either comparative or total obscurity. The result is that the other actors in the play wander about in the penumbras of the stage; and we even forget their presence unless by chance they happen to pass momentarily across the beam of light thrown upon de Ryons. Instances of false emphasis of this kind are fortunately infrequent, so rare indeed that Parigot felt able to say of Dumas: "No one better than he, without altering the general harmony of a play, knew how to keep in its true light the feature of a character upon which he wished to cast a dazzling light at the end of the play."[30]

In his discussion of the next phase of dramatic art, the theory of dénouements, Dumas was untiring. Departing from the traditional happy ending, he substituted the necessary finale, often compelling the audience, as we have already seen, to accept the dénouement which he had planned. This dénouement, he insists, must be in the mind of the author from the beginning: "I shall even add that one must begin the play by its dénouement, that is to say, begin a play only when one has in mind the final scene, the final movement, the final word."[31] The best example of the application of this theory occurs in *La Princesse Georges*, where the author works up scene after scene against Séverine until she finally bursts out against her mother at the injustice of the circumstances

[29] *Préface, Père prodigue*, III, p. 211.
[30] Parigot: *Théâtre d'hier*, p. 138.
[31] *Au public*, V, p. 79.

which surround her.[32] At times, the audience obtains a glimpse of what the dénouement is to be, as in *La Femme de Claude*, where we learn that a fortune-teller has predicted that Césarine will meet a violent death.[33] More often, however, the solution comes as a total surprise to the spectator. René Doumic states that a curious study might be made of the dénouements of Dumas *fils*, that without exception they are in formal contradiction with the probable issue which the situation offered by the dramatist would involve. In real life, he states, M. de Nanjac, in *Le Demi-Monde*, would have married the baronne d'Ange; and, in *Les Idées de madame Aubray*, Mme Aubray would have refused to allow her son to marry Jeannine.[34] To claim that the dénouement is unreal in every one of the plays of Dumas *fils*, without exception, is an exaggeration. It is nevertheless true that in some instances a purely melodramatic device is used to produce the dénouement which Dumas desires, as M. Doumic justly observes in another interesting volume, *De Scribe à Ibsen*.[35] In *Le Demi-Monde*, the pretense that de Nanjac is dead is not a logical development of the play, nor is the clever Suzanne a woman to be deceived thereby. We have also cited cases such as *Héloïse Paranquet* and *Les Danicheff* which offer flagrant examples of artificial dénouements. The reader may object against this evidence the fact that Corneille made use of a fortuitous event (the scene of the king) in *Le Cid* to effect his dénouement; and Molière adopted a purely artificial device (the intervention of the king) to bring about the defeat of Tartuffe in the play of that name. Such precedents might, to some extent, excuse Dumas were it not at the same time true that in his *Tartuffe* Molière was interested primarily in a study of character; and that, the moment he had completed his picture, the dénouement mattered little. In the case of Corneille, countervailing, refutatory evidence may be offered in the fact that *Horace* and *Cinna* reveal a fully adequate preparation for the culmination of the conflict of events. These writers never professed dogmatic theories concerning dénoue-

[32] *Princesse Georges*, Act III, sc. 1, 152.
[33] *Femme de Claude*, Act I, sc. 1, 236.
[34] Doumic: *Portraits d'écrivains*, p. 47.
[35] Doumic: *De Scribe à Ibsen*, p. 67: "Above all the dénouement shocks us by its combination of the melodramatic and the infantile, by that ruse which consists in pretending that Nanjac is dead, by that clumsy trap in which the clever Suzanne is caught."

ments, but Dumas *fils* declared: "One must never modify a dénouement. A dénouement is a mathematical total. If your total is false, your entire operation is invalid."[36] Therefore, if we are to hold the author strictly to account for his own statements, we must admit that at times he convicts himself of poor workmanship by his own evidence, and that anything that he may say in the dénouements of his plays may be used against him.

Le Fils naturel is a play which belies M. Doumic's over-zealous statement. The dramatic struggle in this play is the conflict between the egoism of Sternay and the sterling qualities and generosity of the illegitimate son whom he has disdained. A finer study in egoism than Sternay is difficult to find in dramatic literature; and every event in the play leads up to the logical dénouement offered by the author, who cleverly sustains our interest until the last moment. That Jacques should make his father a Count in return for his ungracious conduct is surprising to the uncharitable mind; but it is essentially what a person of Jacques' temperament would do. M. Doumic confuses, it would seem, the ordinary man with the exceptional man whom Dumas sometimes portrays for us; and it is hardly fair to assume that the exceptional character will follow the instincts of the normal man. It is true that the average woman would not permit her son to marry Jeannine; but Mme Aubray has constantly shown herself throughout the play to be more charitable than the average woman and a more steadfast believer in the golden rule.

In pursuing further his investigations of dramatic theories, Dumas stipulates that the content of a play and the treatment of this subject-matter must harmonize as a picture with its frame: "Finally, we dramatists must have an exact notion of our limits, which forbids us to make our picture larger than its frame, for the dramatic writer who has the most to say must say everything between eight in the evening and midnight, with an allowance of one hour for entr'actes and relaxation for the spectator."[37] In his first comedies, Dumas succeeds admirably in realizing this ideal: *La Dame aux camélias* and *Le Demi-Monde* are exquisitely framed pictures. In the thesis-plays, harmony is also maintained, but not quite so con-

[36] *Au public*, V, p. 79.

[37] *Préface, Père prodigue*, III, p. 211.

spicuously. When, however, Dumas strives to become a prophet in his symbolistic plays, he attempts to force too large a picture into his frame. M. Doumic has called attention to this fact in his *Portraits d'écrivains:* "Such is the road traversed by M. Dumas. Starting from a direct observation of reality, attracted by general theories and by abstract ideas, he arrives at an ambitious symbolism. But this time he asked too much of the theater; he tried to force too many things into the frame, particularly things which could not enter it. He made the frame crack."[38]

Few writers have felt inclined to take issue with Dumas *fils* concerning the numerous theories which we have just outlined; for they are admittedly fundamentals of dramatic art. When, however, he attempted to defend the use of a style which is, to say the least, unliterary, he found many critics unwilling to agree with him. These views of Dumas on style are very clearly defined. In the first place, he chooses a simple style as best suited to the child-like nature of his public; and later he finds that the simplicity of an allegorical or biblical style is admirably suited to his symbolistic plays: "Picture to yourself a class of boys and girls from ten to twelve years of age, some of them thinking of their tops, others of their dolls. Imagine that you have them under your direction and that you want to explain and teach them biblical history. If you do not relate it in the language of *petit Poucet* or the *Blue Bird* they will not listen to you. Who knows, furthermore, whether the great moral truths of religion do not need the fiction, the supernatural, the marvelous which envelops them, in order that men may listen to them! To return to our public, the serious things which we have to say to it must seem more amusing than the things which ordinarily amuse it."[39]

It is quite possible that the adoption of a simple, conversational style, rather than a studied, so-called literary method of expression, was for Dumas the line of least resistance; for he willingly acknowledges his difficulties in writing: "Never, alas, have I written purely that difficult French language in which the verb *avoir*, the verb *faire*, and the verb *être* would discourage the bravest of men."[40] Sentences such as "Soit, mais il fallait que ce qui a été

[38] Page 31.
[39] *Préface, Étrangère,* VI, p. 200.
[40] *Au lecteur,* I, p. 3.

fût. Ne regrettez rien. Cela vaut mieux comme cela est"[41] in which the style is jerky and irregular, lacking the fluency and ease characteristic of most French writers, are not uncommon in the plays of Dumas *fils*. There is little doubt that the author's lack of education of a regular nature during his youth has a great deal to do with this; but at least we may be thankful that he never constructed sentences like those of his father, which necessitate several readings before we can understand them.[42]

Dumas *fils* considers that dramatic style need not necessarily be grammatically correct: "Does this language of the theater need to be correct? In the grammatical sense, no. It must, above all, be clear, colorful, penetrating, incisive."[43] Georges Pellissier, among others, has upheld Dumas in this attitude. "What does it matter," he states, "whether the style of Dumas fails to observe the rules of the Academy, whether irregularities and mistakes in grammar are not rare in his work? It is a living style. With Dumas every sentence hits the mark."[44] The following are a number of colloquialisms and phrases which most dramatists of Dumas' generation would have avoided:

Il n'est qu'onze heures dix.[45]
Vous êtes fièrement réussi, mon cher oncle.[46]
Il y a des petites choses que je ne pouvais sauver.[47]
Ce sont choses que je connais très peu.[48]
Il s'agit de Victoire . . . que nous avons été voir ensemble.[49]
Non, mais dès que le comte a eu pris congé d'elle, je suis rentré.[50]
Quand vous avez été parti . . .[51]
Quand vous avez été résolu à vous marier . . .[52]
Quand il a eu payé tout ce qu'il devait.[53]
C'est déjà difficile d'aimer celle qu'on épouse.[54]
C'est devenu nécessaire.[55]

[41] *Étrangère*, Act III, sc. 1, 302.
[42] Cf. *Les Trois Mousquetaires*, edition Calmann-Lévy, p. 39: "La porte était restée entr'ouverte, tant l'arrivée d'Athos, dont, malgré le secret gardé, la blessure était connue de tous, avait produit de sensation."
[43] *Préface, Père prodigue*, III, p. 213.
[44] Pellissier: *Le mouvement littéraire au XIX^e siècle*, p. 364.
[45] *Question d'argent*, Act II, sc. 3, 274.
[46] *Ibid.*, p. 278.
[47] *Demi-Monde*, Act II, sc. 1, 71.
[48] *Comtesse Romani*, Act III, sc. 2, 339.
[49] *Idées de madame Aubray*, Act IV, sc. 1, 320.
[50] *Ami des femmes*, Act IV, sc. 2, 155.
[51] *Question d'argent*, Act II, sc. 5, 283.
[52] *Fils naturel*, Act II, sc. 4, 115.
[53] *Père prodigue*, Act I, sc. 9, 242.
[54] *Les Danicheff*, Act IV, sc. 1, 231.
[55] *Femme de Claude*, Act I, sc. 5, 258.

Vous souvient-il, comtesse, qu'un jour vous avez remarqué un hôtel? [56]

Dumas justly observes that incorrectness of speech passes unnoticed upon the stage and often lends naturalness to the characters: "These inaccuracies, which shock us so greatly when we read them, not only pass unnoticed on the stage, in the intonation of the actor and in the movement of the drama, but even give life at times to the ensemble in the same manner that small eyes, a large nose, a wide mouth, or dishevelled hair often give more grace, more features, more passion, more accentuation to a head than does Grecian regularity." [57] It is quite true that these liberties in speech lend characterization to the persons in the plays of Dumas, as several examples will illustrate. For instance, the lack of culture of Mme Guichard is clearly reflected in her speech:

Madame Guichard: C'est vrai, je suis une femme de rien, une fille du peuple, une femme de bas étage, comme tu dis. C'est à peine si je sais lire et écrire, et je parle, Dieu sait comme! [58]

The emotion of Mme Aubray over Jeannine's recital of her past is very well rendered by an inversion of word order:

Madame Aubray: Et cependant, cet homme, vous l'aimez? [59]

As in the above speech of Mme Aubray, inversion is again used with great effect to show the sincerity of Francine:

Francine: Je t'aime passionément; j'adore l'enfant né de cet amour, je suis très une honnête femme et je n'ai qu'une ideé, c'est de continuer à l'être. [60]

Dumas sought strength, rather than absolute correctness, in his style: " . . . the thought being strong and solid, it rises and stands out through that colorless and weak form just as mountains through the morning mists." [61] He imagined that the expression would always seek the level of the thought: "Expression will always be,

[56] *Princesse de Bagdad,* Act I, sc. 2, 30.
[57] *Préface, Père prodigue,* III, p. 215.
[58] *Monsieur Alphonse,* Act II, sc. 3, 115.
[59] *Idées de madame Aubray,* Act II, sc. 7, 277.
[60] *Francillon,* Act I, sc. 6, 305.
[61] *Préface, Père prodigue,* III, pp. 215-216.

in spite of yourself, on a level with the thought: correct and firm if the thought is lofty, flabby and puffed up if the thought is common."[62] The inaccuracy of this generalization is evident in some passages in the plays. Gérard's expression of his feelings, in the following passage, is ludicrous and melodramatic, perhaps because Dumas, putting lofty thoughts into the speech of his character, imagined that the style would automatically rise to the same height as the thoughts expressed:

GÉRARD, *tenant Catherine appuyé contre son cœur:* Et alors, pauvre chère victime de l'erreur humaine, tu auras accompli ton sacrifice jusqu'au bout. Et si Dieu réunit véritablement dans son sein, comme on nous l'affirme, comme je le crois, ceux qui se sont aimés profondément et uniquement sur cette terre, tu arriveras devant lui avec ton droit complet, puisque tu auras attendu l'heure qu'il t'aura fixée. Si je meurs demain, moi, d'une mort violente et en essayant de tuer un autre homme, j'aurai cette excuse que je défendrai l'honneur et la liberté de la femme à qui Dieu lui-même avait voulu que je fusse uni, puisqu'elle m'aimait comme je l'aimais. Voilà tout ce que nous devons nous dire à ce moment suprême, voilà ce qui doit élever et fortifier nos âmes à cette heure solennelle où nous sommes en face de l'amour et de la mort, les deux seuls points par lesquels l'homme touche à l'infini. Quand je t'ai revue, il y a deux jours, quand je croyais avoir encore de longues années à vivre, j'ai voulu que tu restasses pure puisque tu n'étais pas libre. Dieu soit béni! Nous n'avons rien à nous reprocher. Je pourrai mourir sans remords et tu pourras vivre sans honte![63]

After such a speech, we have nothing left to do but wish Gérard a speedy death!

At other times, however, it is but fair to confess, Dumas attains great heights in emotional style. We have an example of this in *Les Idées de madame Aubray*. Camille, who is studying to be a physician, has had occasion to come into contact with the pitiful side of the life of fallen women, and he relates his experiences in a speech which greatly stirs the reader or the spectator:

CAMILLE: Tout jeune que je suis, j'ai reçu des confidences de femmes, et dans des moments solennels, quand la douleur et la mort étaient assises avec moi au chevet de leur lit d'hôpital. J'en ai vu souffrir, j'en ai vu mourir, de ces créatures tombées, auxquelles pas un de ceux qui avaient

[62] *Préface, Père prodigue,* III, p. 216. [63] *Étrangère,* Act V, sc. 4, 365.

aidé à leur chute ne faisait l'aumône d'une visite ou d'un souvenir. La nuit, dans un long dortoir blanc, semblable à un cimetière éclairé par la lune, au milieu de souffrances abominables, avec une prière muette qu'on ne leur avait jamais apprise, j'en ai vu, de ces filles, qui mettaient au monde un petit être sans nom, et j'ai entendu le premier cri maternel répondant au premier cri de l'enfant. Je sais ce qu'il y avait d'amour, d'innocence, de vertu dans ce cri poussé par l'âme toute entière, redevenue divine pendant un moment, à qui la vérité apparaissait tout à coup, tandis que le père inconnu se dérobait à ces cris et à cette vérité au fond d'un cabaret ou de quelque autre mauvais lieu. C'est alors que j'ai rougi de l'homme, et que je l'ai trouvé inférieur à cette fille méprisée; c'est alors que j'ai remercié Dieu de m'avoir donné, à moi, une mère comme la mienne, et que je me suis promis de ne voir qu'avec mes yeux et de ne juger qu'avec ma conscience.[64]

It will be seen that in all of the statements which Dumas makes concerning style, he has one basic conception; namely, that a fluent, rapid, colloquial style is necessary for the stage. He seeks naturalness of conversation rather than grammatical correctness of speech in his characters. He achieves great success in the brilliance of his dialogue, failing on occasions only when he assumes that the style will of itself seek the level of the thought which he wishes to express.

As we shift our attention from his theories on the drama and cast a glance at his conception of the dramatist in person, we notice that Dumas *fils* had an interesting conception of the manner in which one becomes a dramatist. In the preface to his *Père prodigue*, he tells us that "one can become a painter, a sculptor, and even a musician by dint of study; one never becomes a dramatic author. One is so immediately or never, just as one is blond or brunette, without any choice in the matter."[65] This does not mean that the dramatist's ideas are determined at the outset of his career and remain fixed. A dramatist's ideas, so Dumas tells us, improve with maturity: "The dramatic author, in proportion as he advances in life, may acquire more elevated thoughts, develop a higher form of philosophy, conceive and execute works that are more consistent

[64] *Idées de madame Aubray*, Act III, sc. 1, 298-299.

[65] A similar statement occurs in the preface of the *Théâtre des Autres:* "One can become a skillful sculptor, a remarkable graphic artist, a learned musician, but one does not become a dramatic author if one is not so at the outset."

than those of his first plays."[66] Without attempting to question the validity or the falsity of this statement, we must agree that new ideas seemed to come to Dumas in profusion throughout his dramatic career. His subject-matter appears endless in variety despite the fact that he always shows his predilection for certain subjects.

As he pursues further his discussion of dramatic ideas, Dumas tells us that whereas the dramatist may gain in ideas with maturity, he loses in technique: "... you will readily recognize that the first plays of Molière, of Corneille, and of Racine, from the point of view of workmanship, are as well constructed as their last plays, indeed sometimes better, for as regards that natural gift of movement, of situation, of effect, of clearness, of life, in short, we lose it almost always in proportion as we advance in age, in inverse proportion as we gain knowledge of the human heart."[67] Few readers will permit the validity of this statement to remain unchallenged. How can anyone assert that *La Jalousie du Barbouillé*, or *Le Médecin volant*, or *L'Étourdi* are to be considered, from the point of view of technique, in the same class as *Tartuffe* or *Le Malade imaginaire?* An examination of *Le Cid*, of *Horace*, and of *Cinna* will reveal a gradual increase in excellence of technique. The plays of Racine may have a more uniform level of excellence; but it is hard to convince oneself that technique suffers in the later plays of Racine. Yet, however unfortunate Dumas may have been in the selection of his examples, he has made a statement partially applicable to himself. *La Dame aux camélias*, 1852, is technically a fine piece of work. *La Femme de Claude*, written in 1873, contains passages of uncommon technique as far as character building is concerned; but, at the same time, shows great weaknesses. The soliloquy of Claude at the beginning of the third act is a distinct error in technique; for Claude is by no means an idealist, but a very practical man. From the point of view of technique, *La Comtesse Romani*, produced in 1876, has little to recommend it. On the other hand, the last plays of Dumas, *Denise*, 1885, and *Francillon*, 1887, written after the author's recovery from his temporary symbolistic dementia, are well-constructed plays.

[66] *Préface, Étrangère*, VI, p. 220. [67] *Ibid.*, p. 220.

Inasmuch as the above citation is from the preface to *L'Étrangère*, a symbolistic play, it would seem that Dumas is attempting to apologize for the lack of success of these symbolistic dramas by making us believe that we must not expect too much attention to technique in the plays produced late in his career. We are inclined to believe that he never would have felt compelled to make this statement if he had adhered to the thesis-play which he had so successfully developed. He was finding difficulty in reconciling too many factors: "If we can therefore conciliate truth, the public taste, the interests of art and those of the director, everything goes well; but that is not easy, and in the struggle it is always truth that is condemned to concessions."[68] Apparently Dumas struggled against sacrificing truth, for which he had great reverence, with the result that the interests of art were slighted.

Before passing to our next chapter, which shall be rather closely allied with the content of what we have just been discussing, let us summarize briefly these various dramatic theories of Dumas *fils*. We have noted that he considered his audience to be child-like, but was ever anxious to win its affection. Youth attracts youth, and thus he populated his plays with characters which, although they had arrived at the age of discretion, still retained the buoyancy of immaturity; and he relegated old age into the background. After years of intimacy with his public, he found it restless under his incessant predication, and he made renewed efforts to regain its interest by altering the character of his productions, only to come to the conclusion that he had outdistanced his public. Turning to a discussion of dramatic theories, he imposed logic as a prime dramatic requisite, adding as other essentials accentuation, contrast, rapidity of action, and arrangement of characters. He insisted upon inexorable progress toward a mathematical dénouement regardless of the desire of the audience for a happy ending. Lastly, he demanded a sense of proportion between the content of the play and its setting, likening it to a picture within its frame. For his dialogue, he advocated a fluent, colloquial style for passages of ordinary conversation, believing that the conception of a lofty idea would automatically induce literary expression where necessary.

[68] *Ibid.*, p. 197.

Considering the character of the dramatist himself, Dumas stated that the dramatist is born, not made, that his ideas develop with maturity, but that his technique weakens proportionally.

CHAPTER IX

THE DRAMATIC TECHNIQUE OF DUMAS *FILS*

"NO one has known the theater better than Dumas *fils;* no one has been more thoroughly acquainted with its handling and its manipulation."[1] "No one in our day has been more a master of the theater than Dumas; no one has exercised a more considerable action upon the public."[2] Such are the opinions of Sarcey and Doumic. Judgments as unqualified as these certainly justify examination; and it will perhaps prove profitable for us to devote some attention to the main elements of the dramatic technique of Dumas *fils*. Biological dissection, it is true, does not reveal the soul which inhabits the body. A good drama is a work of art; and, in separating it into its elements, we must risk losing for a moment the beauty of the work as a whole. Yet, in order to differentiate the work of Dumas *fils* from that of his fellow dramatists, we must of necessity investigate his methods of workmanship. To this end, we have in previous chapters attempted to present a survey of the work of Dumas taken as a whole before entering into a discussion of details, trusting that, in this manner, we may enable the reader to keep in mind the complete pattern of the mosaic as we examine the individual tiles of which it is composed. Many of the elements which constitute the dramatic technique of Dumas *fils* are too subtle to admit of definition and explanation; they are the secret of the dramatist's art. Other features, however, are more tangible, and these we can readily determine. Of them, the most conspicuous are: the *raisonneur*, the interrelation of characters, the "fore-and-aft" arrangement of groups, the "triangle plus," and the *liaison* of scenes. In the present chapter, we shall consider these five elements in the order named, and conclude with a few remarks upon the author's style.

As we survey the entire work of Dumas *fils*, we observe that most of the plays contain a character defined by critics as the *rai-*

[1] Sarcey: *Quarante ans de théâtre*, V, pp. 179-180.

[2] Doumic: *Essais sur le théâtre contemporain*, pp. 27-28.

sonneur or *porte-parole*. This character develops and elucidates the theories of the author so forcibly as to leave no doubt in the reader's mind concerning the exact thesis which the dramatist is attempting to develop. If some character in the play offers an opinion opposed to the conclusions of Dumas, other characters immediately express contrary opinions, and the *raisonneur* appears who soon solves the difficulty for us and expresses the creed of Dumas on the subject. The *raisonneur* is particularly prominent in the thesis-play; but he is ubiquitous throughout the works of the dramatist. In *Le Demi-Monde*, it is Olivier de Jalin; in *La Question d'argent*, de Cayolle; in *Le Fils naturel*, Aristide Fressard; in *L'Ami des femmes*, de Ryons. One does not have to read far into a play of Dumas *fils* to discover which character is developing the author's ideas; and, in some cases, the author takes it upon himself to indicate in a preface the identity of his spokesman.[3] It is interesting to note that the conception of this character is by no means original with Dumas *fils*. In Molière's *Misanthrope*, he appears in the rôle of Philinte. Petit de Julleville indicates that this type was brought back to the French stage with great success by Théodore Barrière in *Les Filles de marbre*, 1853; that the *raisonneurs* are figures of the theater rather than of society; that, in the case of Molière, they represent his characters of lesser stress; and that the dramatist runs the risk of making them mechanical automatons rather than living creatures.[4] This last criticism is unfortunately true of Dumas *fils* in some instances; for the *raisonneur* must at times deliver long monologues in order to do full justice to the ideas emphasized by the dramatist, and thus naturalness is sacrificed. Dumas evidently realized that he was sacrificing dramatic reality to the promulgation of his ideas; for, on one occasion, he attempted to excuse, in the eyes of his audience, two verbose but interesting discourses. In *La Question d'argent*, after a lengthy reply to the ideas of Giraud on nobility and money, de Cayolle terminates his discourse with the following speech which is palpably a dramatic device: "And the proof is that they have listened to me longer than

[3] *Notes sur Denise*, VII, p. 252: "Everything that Thouvenin says is irrefutable." *Préface, Visite de noces*, V, p. 18: "When M. de Cygneroi, in the scene with Lebonnard, makes a decomposition of adultery, it is I who am speaking."

[4] Petit de Julleville: *Histoire de la langue et de la littérature française*, VIII, pp. 107, 109.

they listened to you, and I have not, like you, a thousand franc note to put into each of my sentences."[5]

Although Dumas *fils* cannot be credited with inventing the *raisonneur*, he assuredly developed the use of this character to its fullest possibilities. It is, moreover, quite natural that he should have done so; for, with his natural combativeness, his logical mind, and his prodigious energy in argumentation, he had but to convert himself into the character whom he was placing upon the stage. This fact accounts in large measure for the marked similarity that exists between all of the *raisonneurs* of Dumas *fils*. Perhaps the author might have made them distinctive personalities if he had concentrated his attention more upon the emotional side of these men than upon the intellectual side. He had achieved success in differentiating his characters in *La Dame aux camélias*, before social problems obsessed his mind; and, in later plays, those characters which are not vehicles for the development of the author's arguments are the most distinctive of his personages; but even they do not impress us very greatly with their trueness to life. Even in *La Dame aux camélias*, M. Duval lacks the reality which the other participants in the drama possess; and, in subsequent plays, we remember the various *raisonneurs* not as striking individuals but as uniformly patterned orators. It seems that, in the thesis-drama, the *raisonneur* must be, at best, a necessary evil, true to life only when the dramatist can curb his own desire to use the character merely for the promulgation of ideas and endow his spokesman with human qualities other than mere intelligence.

It would be erroneous, however, to assume that the above-mentioned lack of contrast between the *raisonneurs* is characteristic of other personages, either in different plays or in individual dramas. In *La Princesse Georges*, we have Terremonde, who represents passion and who kills, in vivid contrast with Séverine, who represents love and who pardons. In *Le Supplice d'une femme*, the frankness and generosity of Dumont is opposed to the treachery and the ingratitude of Alvarez. So also does the saneness and stability of Dumont gain greater relief when compared with the hot-headedness of Alvarez. In *Les Idées de madame Aubray*, the romantic exuberance of Camille and of Jeannine stands out clearly

[5] *Question d'argent*, Act I, sc. 4, 253-255.

against the realistic temperament of the older characters in the play. In *La Question d'argent*,[6] a similar contrast is worked out with great skill and delicacy. Here Jean Giraud, practical and unromantic, totally absorbed in figuring out his accounts, is completely oblivious to the romantic scene between René and Mathilde which is taking place in his very presence. In this same play, the truly noble birth of de Cayolle offsets the *parvenu* element in Jean Giraud; and, at the same time, the honesty of de Roncourt counterbalances the unscrupulousness of Jean Giraud. Occasionally the characters in the plays observe these contrasts, as, for instance, Mme Dumont who, in *Le Supplice d'une femme*, remarks upon the difference in character between her husband and Alvarez which we have just indicated. She declares to Alvarez: "Can I help his being just as good as you are cruel, as noble as you are unjust, as devoted as you are ungrateful? Can I help comparing you, the one with the other, can I help repenting and finding him superior in every way to you and particularly to me?"[7]

Not only was Dumas skillful in contrasting one character with another; he also met with success in projecting a character against a background of an entirely different color. In *Les Idées de madame Aubray*, the innocent Lucienne, fifteen years of age, who speaks of *amants* without knowing the true meaning of the term, forms a pretty contrast to the dismal drama which is going on in the house. In *Le Demi-Monde*, the sweet, innocent youth of Marcelle is bright and colorful against the drab and desolate background of the *demi-monde*.

Further instances of contrast abound in the plays of Dumas *fils;* but the examples above are sufficient evidence of how fully the dramatist worked out in his plays the theory of oppositions to which he refers in the preface to *Un Père prodigue*. As most people are aware, a camera is capable of recording two very different reproductions of the same image. If we open wide the diaphragm and give a short exposure, we must expect to obtain a picture in soft tones with a blurred background against which a few salient features stand out in light contrast. If, on the other hand, we diminish the aperture of the diaphragm and give a long exposure, we have as our result a picture in which there is an equal amount of

[6] Act II, sc. 8. [7] Act I, sc. 11, 65.

detail in both foreground and background, and we obtain clear, sharply cut, contrasting images. With Dumas, the camera is "stopped down" and the picture which he gives us is one of marked contrasts and of great definition.

Photographic precision, however, does not necessarily produce trueness to life. Dumas, with all of his skill in contrast, rarely produced major characters of real flesh and blood. His talent does not lie in the creation of living characters, but rather in the dramatic interrelation of his personages. His *raisonneurs*, with their verbose tirades, would be laughed off the stage were it not for the fact that the dramatist had already so connected them with other characters as to give promise of a struggle which is, of course, the essence of drama. Thus, in *Le Demi-Monde*, Olivier de Jalin is worked into a dramatic contention of forces with de Nanjac and Suzanne; in *Le Fils naturel*, Aristide Fressard is inseparably linked with Sternay, Clara Vignot, Jacques, and Hermine. Dumas shows unusual ability in his constant association of individuals throughout the action of a play. The characters are manipulated much like the men on a chess-board: each move involves a new situation; and the aggressive dramatist, never permitting any piece of consequence to remain idle, concentrates his forces in a relentless attack which culminates in an inevitable checkmate.

In connection with the interrelation of characters, we notice that Dumas occasionally develops what has been termed the "fore-and-aft" arrangement of personages. In several plays, there is not only a prominent group immediately occupied with a certain problem, but an older group which has finished with it and gives advice, and a younger group which finds itself on the threshold of the problem. This is true particularly of *Le Demi-Monde* and *La Question d'argent*, as the reader will recall to mind. Such an arrangement gives the audience the impression that the problem under discussion is not an exceptional one, of transitory importance, but one which is so fundamental that successive generations find themselves confronted with the same difficulties. It likewise results in greater concentration of interest; for the public is eager to observe the reactions of the various groups.

Another point of interest in connection with the arrangement of characters in the plays of Dumas *fils* is what we have previously

mentioned as the "triangle plus." Before the "triangle" play was fully developed, Dumas had already given examples of the triangle with an additional character woven into the main action. Besides the one lover (actual or potential), we have either an additional one, or even several. Thus, in *L'Ami des femmes*, to the triangle of de Ryons, Jane, and de Simerose, there is added de Montègre. In *Francillon*, Lucien and Francine form the two sides of the triangle; but the spectators are not quite sure whether the third side is to be represented by Pinguet or Rosalie Michon. The audience is also interested to ascertain whether three other characters, Stanislas de Grandredon, Jean de Carillac, and Henri de Symeux are to have a part in the formation of the three-sided figure. Other dramatists have given us, shortly after the rise of the curtain, the fully formed, geometrically drawn triangle. Dumas occasionally marks in heavy strokes but two sides of the figure, leaving the third side either in light pencil or else a blank to be filled in later. The very incompleteness of the drawing is suggestive and invites speculation. Will it become necessary later to draw in ink the faintly traced pencil line; shall we have to erase it and substitute another; or will the third line never need tracing, and will the other two sides of the angle, with nothing further to keep them apart, fall together and point in one direction? The possibilities of variety and suspense under this dramatic arrangement of Dumas become limitless.

Having examined the manner in which Dumas interrelates his characters, let us now review for a moment his procedure in gaining dramatic effect by the *liaison* of scenes. In our second chapter, which discusses the influence of Corneille upon Dumas *fils*, we called attention to the manner in which both dramatists used the "seeds of preparation" and the strong, progressive linking of successive scenes. As examples, we mentioned Corneille's *Horace* and Dumas' *La Princesse Georges*. We also developed the subject of sowing of "seeds" in chapter eight, in connection with Dumas' theory that the dramatist must continually direct the attention of the spectator toward a definite phase of a major character. For this present chapter, we have reserved the treatment of the linking of scenes, inasmuch as it constitutes a part of the technique of Dumas which he did not stress in his discussion of the drama.

Notice, first of all, that Dumas *fils* does not use the system of balance of Augier, but directs his plot logically and unremittingly toward the crisis of events. Professor Hugh A. Smith remarks concerning Dumas: "His faultless logic and intense dramatic movement carry us along to the dénouement without a chance, or perhaps even a desire, for escape. It is only if we have the curiosity to return to the point where we were swept into the stream that we become aware how carefully the ways were oiled for our downfall."[8] It is precisely by the dovetailing of scenes that Dumas "oiled the ways for our downfall," or at least kept us from coming to rest.

In any system which depends upon momentum for its force, a pause is fatal. The fall of the curtain at the end of an act marks a breathing spell which the dramatist is compelled to grant his audience. No one was more conscious than Dumas of the danger involved in allowing intermissions to divert the interest of the spectators. He therefore terminated individual acts in a point of high interest. If the reader will turn back to the summary of the first part of *La Princesse Georges* in chapter two, he will notice that as Séverine, at the end of the first act, pronounces the words: "Oh! je suis une lâche et une malheureuse," Dumas has whetted our interest by the sudden reversal of feeling on the part of the Princess, leaving us eager to learn which emotion is to determine her future actions. Again, at the end of the second act, when Séverine announces to Agénor the fact that his wife has a lover, instead of telling him who the lover is, she replies to his demand for the name of the person: "Cherchez!" Immediately, a host of inquiries arise in our mind. Will Agénor discover that this man is the husband of Séverine? If so, what will be his course of action? Then what will the Prince do? And how will this complicate the situation of Séverine?

Dumas *fils* again displays great talent in sustaining interest by his treatment of the first act of *Les Idées de madame Aubray*. During the act, we have been led to believe that Jeannine is a widow with an only son, Gaston. The little boy, through references to the "Black Prince," has revealed the only name by which we know his father, apparently deceased. Mme Aubray has be-

[8] Hugh Allison Smith: *Main Currents of Modern French Drama*, p. 145.

come acquainted with Jeannine because the latter is earning her living by playing at private concerts. The fact that she, too, is a widow with an only son forms a bond of sympathy between her and Jeannine. But suddenly the act ends with the appearance of Tellier, who has been sitting on the stage holding a newspaper so as to cover his face. When Tellier speaks to Jeannine, little Gaston inquires of his mother who this stranger is. She replies sadly as the curtain descends: "He is the Black Prince, my child." Our interest is immediately awakened. This, then, is the father of the child. But we thought him dead. What reason has Jeannine for concealing the fact? The child must be illegitimate. Then Jeannine is not a widow. This fact may snap asunder the bond between Jeannine and Mme Aubray, who was just about to welcome the visits of Jeannine and create an atmosphere of happiness in her saddened life. Will Mme Aubray discover the deception? If so, what will she do? The entire play will be determined by the answer to these conjectures.

Let us now turn to the end of the third act of this same play. Jeannine has confessed to Mme Aubray that she is unmarried. Mme Aubray has expressed her views on the subject with great frankness and with unusual charity. She sees no reason why Jeannine, repentant, and thoroughly chaste since her first fault, should not marry a young man of good family. She has even told Valmoreau that she knows a young woman, charming in every respect, who has committed a fault, and suggests that she would make a good wife for him. As the act ends, Camille, Mme Aubray's only son, declares his love to Jeannine and cannot understand her refusal to marry him. She tells him to talk the matter over with his mother. Upon his inquiry as to whether she will marry him if he gains the consent of his mother, she replies that she will do whatever Mme Aubray wishes. The act ends:

CAMILLE, *to Valmoreau:* Ah! my friend, I am eager to see my mother.
VALMOREAU, *to himself:* There is a young man who is going to suffer, but how willing I would be to suffer like that!

Will Mme Aubray have the courage to follow her conviction that a young woman in Jeannine's situation would make an acceptable wife for a young man of good family, when she discovers that

it is her own son who wishes to marry Jeannine? If not, will Camille then be doomed to suffering as Valmoreau predicts? Will Valmoreau change his views and he himself marry Jeannine?

Les Danicheff presents another interesting instance of suspense of interest. The Countess Danicheff, discovering that her son Wladimir loves her serf, Anna Ivanowna, whom she has reared almost as her own daughter, secretly frees both Anna and the coachman Osip and forces them to marry. Wladimir, the reader will remember, is sent to Moscow to spend some months there, the Countess promising that he may marry Anna upon his return if, after seeing many noble-born girls of marriageable age, he still persists in his resolution. The Countess has already determined upon Lydia Walanoff as the bride destined for her son, although gossip has freely used the reputation of Lydia as its target. As the curtain goes down on the second act, Wladimir has discovered the treachery of his mother. He tells Lydia frankly that he will not marry her and upbraids his mother for her ill-doing. He departs in search of Anna, threatening to kill Anna, Osip, and himself. Lydia swears vengeance. The melodramatic touch of this climax is perhaps mitigated by French views on Russian character; but, in spite of its exaggeration, the situation is sufficiently tense to cause the spectator to hope that the *entr'acte* may be of short duration.

In a much better constructed play, *Le Supplice d'une femme*, another point of high interest is reached. The first act reveals the fact that Mathilde, wife of Dumont, has fallen a victim to the wiles of Alvarez, who has saved Dumont from bankruptcy. A child, Jeanne, has been born, whom Dumont adores in the full confidence that she is his own daughter. Alvarez, dissatisfied with eight years of deceit and lying to Dumont, wishes to end the difficulty by persuading Mathilde to desert Dumont and flee with him to a foreign country. She refuses to forsake her husband even though she still loves Alvarez. The curtain falls as she exclaims: "Oh God! what torture!" Which course will she follow in her dilemma? Which will gain the victory, love or duty?

In the second act Dumont learns the truth. In a pathetic scene, alone with Jeanne who is no longer his daughter, he breaks down and weeps, and the act ends:

JEANNE, *terror-stricken:* What is the matter? (*She takes her handkerchief and wipes Dumont's eyes.*) You mustn't cry, dear father. Men don't cry. Little girls do that.

DUMONT: You are right. (*He rings.*) Run away and play. (*To the servant.*) Go to M. Alvarez and tell him that I am waiting for him.

Upon this interview, of course, will rest the solution of the play.

An analysis of other plays of Dumas *fils* will reveal many more examples of suspense of dramatic interest. We might mention, in passing, the end of the third act of *La Dame aux camélias* where the contents of Marguerite's letter remain undisclosed; the end of the fourth act of *Diane de Lys* where Paul, alone on the stage, utters his challenge to the Count; the end of the prologue of *Le Fils naturel* where Clara discovers that Lucien is about to desert her to marry another woman; the end of the first act of the same play where Jacques departs in search of his father; the end of the third act of *Denise* where Brissot, having learned that Fernand has seduced Denise, demands that he send his mother to ask the hand of Denise for her son. These instances, and many others which we might find, would merely give further evidence of a fact which must be readily apparent to the reader; namely, that Dumas handled suspense of interest at the end of acts with remarkable success. It may be noted also that mastery in this element of dramatic technique aided the dramatist greatly in compelling his audience to listen to the instruction and preaching contained in his thesis-plays.

Not only did Dumas *fils* bridge the gap between acts; he also carefully knit together successive scenes within the acts themselves. *Le Fils naturel* is a striking example of this; but so characteristic is this element of Dumas' method of workmanship that it is conspicuous in any of his better plays. It is possible that, in Dumas' own time, individuals may have left the theater during the course of the performance because they were shocked at his audacity. I doubt that they ever left because they found the play dull. The clever dovetailing of successive scenes, which, in turn, gaining impetus, sweep one along in an irresistible current, must have compelled the attention of the spectators, sometimes even in spite of themselves, for many members of Dumas' audiences were thoroughly hostile to his doctrines.

Now that we have viewed in this chapter the characters and the

framework of the plays of Dumas, let us conclude with a brief examination of his style. In the preceding chapter, we have already spoken of the dramatist's theories concerning style; but there remain for discussion two points which are matters of practice rather than of theory, namely, wit and analogy.

Dumas *fils* was quick to perceive the value of the doctrine *castigat ridendo mores*, a maxim which Augier was utilizing, but with genial mildness, at the same time that Dumas was writing his plays. In proportion as Dumas turned from the comedy of manners to the thesis-drama, as he ceased to be a mere observer and became a moralist and a reformer, his wit became more trenchant than that of Augier, and yet equally effective. Wit is ever present in the dramatic works of Dumas *fils* and lends to his last plays the glow of youth which pervades his earliest dramatic efforts. If we were, however, to choose one play in which this element of the dramatist's talent is most evident, our selection would doubtless fall upon his *Ami des femmes*. It is in this work that, in three different statements, de Ryons practically sums up the views of Dumas on the subject of humor which was one of the author's most valuable assets. "Oh, God!" he declares, "how good thou art to have made men so amusing!"[9] "It is not I who created the world; I take it as it is. But I prefer to laugh at it rather than weep over it."[10] "The humorous along side of the serious, that is life."[11] It is this last mentioned juxtaposition of the humorous and the serious that Dumas handles with uncommon dexterity. Not only is humor an integral part of our existence, but it constitutes an actual need; and thus, for the dramatist, "there is no better action than that of causing men, both respectable and otherwise, to laugh and of lifting from their shoulders for the few hours preceding retirement and sleep the burden of existence."[12]

What are, more definitely, the characteristics of the wit of Dumas *fils*? In the first place, he has a happy facility for coining epigrams and facetious generalities. We append a few of these in order to indicate how prevalent is this type of wit in his plays:

[9] *Ami des femmes*, Act V, sc. 7, 205.
[10] *Ibid.*, Act I, sc. 5, 72.
[11] *Ibid.*, Act V, sc. 7, 203.
[12] *Préface, Mariage dans un chapeau, Théâtre des Autres*, I, p. 4.

Men, my dear, are like kites; the more string you give them the tighter you hold them.[13]

One should be married just as one should be vaccinated; it is a preventive.[14]

Nothing can waken the wise man from his slumber.[15]

One can always live with his wife provided that he has something else to do.[16]

The first reason for adoring respectable women is that you should adore them, and the second reason is that you may say anything you wish to them; they blush less readily than the others.[17]

Do you know what pardon is? It is indifference toward that which does not affect you.[18]

BERTHE: There are three of them?

VALENTINE: Including the husband. But a husband is like the *entresol* in large mansions; he doesn't count.[19]

Secondly, Dumas derives humor from a shift from the sublime to the ridiculous, as the following citation will indicate:

Love is spontaneous. People who believe that it comes on little by little, like gout or baldness, are greatly in error.[20]

A third, and very effective element of the wit of Dumas *fils* is the clever turn of phrase for which he is justly famous. In *L'Ami des femmes*, de Chantrin is an exemplary young man who gives up smoking because his mother objects to the odor of tobacco. As he is showing some views to Balbine through a stereoscope he says: "Now here we have Castellamare and Sorrento. There is Vesuvius, always smoking." At this point Leverdet remarks: "It couldn't have been brought up by its mother."[21] Some other instances of this type of witticism are:

OLIVIER: And how about Maucroix? We have chatted about everything except him.

HIPPOLYTE: That's true, we forgot him. How foolish we are!

[13] *Francillon*, Act I, sc. 1, 265.
[14] *Ami des femmes*, Act I, sc. 5, 74.
[15] *Ibid.*, sc. 1, 58.
[16] *Ibid.*, Act I, sc. 5, 74.
[17] *Idées de madame Aubray*, Act I, sc. 2, 234.
[18] *Ibid.*, Act II, sc. 4, 269.
[19] *Princesse Georges*, Act II, sc. 2, 127.
[20] *Idées de madame Aubray*, Act I, sc. 1, 224.
[21] *Ami des femmes*, Act II, sc. 2, 111.

OLIVIER: Would you kindly use the singular?
HYPPOLYTE: Of course. How foolish you are.[22]

LUCIEN: Thank you, gentlemen, perhaps I won't deny that. If it were only the intelligent people in the world who formed public opinion there would be too many fools.
THE MARQUIS (*shrugging his shoulders*): That's true, and there is almost always one more than people believe.[23]

BARANTIN: Miss Capulet! Does she descend from the well-beloved Romeo?
VALMOREAU: By the balcony, perhaps.[24]

DE RYONS: And suppose she runs away with a gentleman?
LEVERDET: Oh, the poor gentleman.[25]

MME LEVERDET: And you are going to marry your cook?
DE RYONS: That will depend upon her cooking.[26]

MME LEVERDET: Did you send for the doctor?
DES TARGETTES: Of course. One always begins by some such stupidity.[27]

DE RYONS: That single letter will be enough to ruin you. If I ever have a daughter she will speak all languages, but she won't learn to write a single one of them.[28]

BARANTIN: Wherever I go, I work.
VALMOREAU: And yet you ought to take a rest.
BARANTIN: If I rest now, what shall I do when I am dead?[29]

DE RYONS: He is perpetually in love, now with one woman, now with another, but always to the same degree.
LEVERDET: He is like alcohol; he never freezes.[30]

BENOIT: Où est ce chapeau?
JEAN: Dans l'antichambre, accroché à un patère.
BENOIT: A une patère.
JEAN: Monsieur dit?
BENOIT: A une patère . . . patère n'est du masculin qu'en latin. On dit un *pater* quand on a commis une faute.
JEAN: Eh bien, monsieur, j'ai commis une faute en disant un pater.[31]

[22] *Demi-Monde*, Act I, sc. 3, 47-48.
[23] *Francillon*, Act II, sc. 7, 348.
[24] *Idées de madame Aubray*, Act I, sc. 1, 226.
[25] *Ami des femmes*, Act I, sc. 5, 74.
[26] *Ibid.*, Act I, sc. 5, 70.
[27] *Ibid.*, Act I, sc. 10, 91.
[28] *Ibid.*, Act IV, sc. 9, 180.
[29] *Idées de madame Aubray*, Act I, sc. 1, 220.
[30] *Ami des femmes*, Act V, sc. 3, 189.
[31] *Mariage dans un chapeau*, sc. 2, 14.

In a word, wit is a most effective element in the plays of Dumas *fils*. He believes it to be one of the most valuable assets of the realistic dramatist. To him, men are amusing and life is characterized by an admixture of the serious and the grotesque. Epigrams, witty contrasts, cleverly turned phrases, all enter into his repertoire. Before we leave this subject, however, let us not fail to observe that Dumas often utilizes wit as a pleasant method of promulgating a serious idea. Those who will take the time to read his thesis-plays will discover that characters in these plays frequently present with a whimsical or humorous touch ideas of very vital import.

The same power of analogy which Dumas utilizes for humorous purposes, he sometimes turns toward more serious ends. Practically every play yields many cases of the evocation of images which greatly accentuate the thought which the author is attempting to emphasize. Take, for example, the following:

> Mme Aubray: First of all, guilty, wicked, and ungrateful people do not really exist; there are only sick people, blind ones, and fools. When we do evil it is not through premeditation, it is through weakness. We believe that the road to the left is more agreeable than the road to the right; and when we are caught in the brambles and in the mire, we call for help. Then it is the duty of the person who is on the safe road to devote his efforts toward saving the other man.[32]

It is difficult to conceive of a clearer or a more convincing picture of human kindness than the above, a picture which is convincing through the cleverness of the analogy. We have another example of very expressive analogy in *L'Ami des femmes*. De Ryons advises Montègre to leave for China immediately; for, if he does not, de Ryons predicts that before long de Montègre will dishonor the woman he loves. When de Montègre challenges de Ryons to give reasons for this statement the latter replies: "Because you can't harness a race horse to a plow; because before you have gone the distance of a quarter length of a furrow you will begin to kick against the shafts and will break everything."[33] In the same play, de Ryons maintains that he has never seen a truly virtuous woman. When Mme Leverdet says: "What! you have never seen a woman

[32] *Idées de madame Aubray*, Act II, sc. 4, 266.

[33] *Ami des femmes*, Act III, sc. 6, 140.

who loves her husband, who loves her children, and whose honor is intact?" de Ryons replies: "Yes! but that is not virtue, that is happiness. That is just as if you were to ask me to admire a certain gentleman who has 500,000 francs income and who has never stolen—since he has had them."[34] *L'Ami des femmes* is filled with sparkling images; and it is usually de Ryons who utters them in the course of his conversation. How precisely does he describe de Montègre's voice, "a sonorous and metallic voice, striking off words as a minting-press strikes off coins."[35] What clever comparisons he makes concerning a woman's life: "A well-bred woman does not pass from one passion to another without an interval of time of more or less duration. You never have two successive accidents on the same railroad."[36] "A woman's past is like a coal mine; you must not go into it with a light or there will be an explosion."[37]

Lest it seem that we are claiming for the works of Dumas *fils* in general an element of technique that exists in only one or two plays, let us seek other examples in different plays:

FRANCINE: She had spread those diamonds all over her mother who accompanied her and who resembled the constellation of the Great Bear, not only in brilliance but in form.[38]

MAXIMILIEN: She is one of those women who spend their lives in lining with a soft padding the ditch into which they intend that their virtue shall fall and who, furious at waiting on the edge for some one to push them in, throw stones at the other women who pass by.[39]

PAUL: Am I jealous of the Duke?
DIANE: Did I ever love him?
PAUL: Or of Maximilien? You certainly loved him.
DIANE: As one loves in a convent-school, as every young girl loves, or rather thinks she loves the first man she sees, a love like one's first teeth which have no roots and which come out without any pain.[40]

OLIVIER: It is impossible to hold conversation with you; you turn into evil the good that one wishes to do you. At the least word you go off like a cannon, with your reasons like 18-inch cannon balls which break one's arms and legs.[41]

[34] *Ibid.*, Act I, sc. 5, 70.
[35] *Ibid.*, Act II, sc. 1, 98.
[36] *Ibid.*, Act I, sc. 5, 68.
[37] *Ibid.*, Act II, sc. 1, 103.
[38] *Francillon*, Act I, sc. 3, 284.
[39] *Diane de Lys*, Act II, sc. 6, 263.
[40] *Ibid.*, Act III, sc. 8, 319-320.
[41] *Demi-Monde*, Act III, sc. 4, 121.

The best case of analogy in the plays of Dumas *fils* is the oft-cited description of the *demi-monde* by Olivier de Jalin, which is truly a remarkable bit of writing:

> Well, some day go into your fruit dealer's, to Chevet or to Potel, and ask him for his best peaches. He will show you a basket containing magnificent specimens of fruit, each one placed at a little distance from the next piece, separated by leaves so that they may not touch each other or rot each other by contact. Ask him the price and he will answer, "Thirty cents a piece." Look around and you will be sure to see in close proximity to this basket another basket filled with peaches apparently exactly the same as the first ones, but placed closer to one another so that you cannot see all sides of them. The dealer has not shown you this group. If you ask him how much these cost he will answer, "Fifteen cents." Naturally you inquire of him why these peaches, just as beautiful, just as ripe, and just as appetizing as the others, cost less. Then he will pick out one at random, will turn it over, and will show you on its under side a little black spot which will be the reason for the lower price. Well, my dear fellow, you are here in the fifteen cent peach basket. All of the women who surround you have a fault in their past, a spot on their name. They huddle together so that it may be as little in evidence as possible and, with the same origin, the same exterior, and the same prejudices as women of the best society, they find that they no longer belong to that society. They make up what is known as the *demi-monde*, which sails like a floating island in the Parisian ocean and which hails, admits, and accepts all who fall, all who emigrate, all who escape from the mainland, not to mention haphazard wrecks of fortune whose original abode is unknown.[42]

The brevity of this section is by no means indicative of the extent to which Dumas made use of analogy in his plays. If the reader opens at random any volume of the plays and begins to read at that point, he will not be long in finding instance upon instance of striking analogy. By way of summary, let it suffice to indicate a fact which the reader has already noticed from the perusal of the examples contained in these few preceding pages: we have here a dramatist who, endowed with a tremendous breadth of observation and an unusual keenness of perception, has a peculiar gift for recording in the conversation of his characters the associative images which come so readily to his mind.

We discover, in recapitulating the contents of this chapter, that

[42] *Demi-Monde*, Act II, sc. 8, 101-102.

Dumas' stage-craft is the work of a master hand. He developed to a unique degree the *raisonneur*, even though he made of him a stereotyped character. He displayed unusual skill in the arrangement of his characters, interweaving them ingeniously into the action of the drama. To secure concentration of interest, he arranged a fore-and-aft group of characters, thereby strengthening his main theme. He developed the triangle-play beyond its usual three-sided limitation. He rendered his action dynamic by terminating individual acts with situations of great intensity, thereby bridging the gap caused by intermissions, and also by dovetailing the scenes within the acts so that their strength became cumulative. His style is conspicuous for two elements, wit and analogy; and these features are largely responsible for the brilliance of his dialogue and for the clarity of what was so dear to his heart, the logical play.

CHAPTER X

THE IDEAS OF DUMAS CONCERNING WOMAN

FEW dramatists have, like Dumas *fils*, written plays in which the main action is dominated by women; and fewer still have depicted so many different feminine types with such unvarying success as he.[1] "She, always she," he declares,[2] and Filoppopoli, expressing his views on the theater in *La Comtesse Romani* declares: "There are evidently still plenty of men, but there are no more women. And the public loves women; we cannot hide that fact. The success of men has little hold upon the theater; the only durable successes are those of women."[3] More than once did Dumas call attention to the fact that woman is despotic in the play: "In fact, if there is any place where Woman affirms despotically the omnipotence which poetry attributes to her and where she makes abusive use of it, it is on the stage. It is love, under all of its aspects, that is the element of the theater; it is emotion that is its end; and it is therefore Woman that is its principle. Without her, no love, no emotion. It is for her that the dramatist writes, it is for her that the public comes."[4] As we know, Dumas intended to give us in the speeches of his characters excerpts from the conversation of every-day life. That woman is a very frequent topic of conversation is evident from the remark of de Ryons: "Leave three men together after dinner, and you may be sure that the conversation will fall upon women and that it will be the oldest of the three who will begin the conversation."[5]

At the outset of his career, Dumas had the greatest sympathy for woman, particularly for the fallen woman. "Thus," laments Marguerite Gautier, "whatever she may do, the fallen creature will never rise again! God will pardon her perhaps, but the world will remain inflexible."[6] He was, nevertheless, entirely mindful

[1] Perhaps the most conspicuous feminist among nineteenth-century dramatists outside of France is Ibsen, whose work has much in common with that of Dumas *fils*.

[2] *A M. Cuvillier-Fleury*, V, p. 191.

[3] *La Comtesse Romani*, Act I, sc. 4, 280.

[4] *Préface, Ami des femmes*, IV, p. 9.

[5] *Ami des Femmes*, Act II, sc. 1, 95.

[6] *Dame aux camélias*, Act III, sc. 4, 136.

of the fact that Marguerite Gautier did not, even in 1852, represent the average woman of her class; for, on the last page of the novelistic version of *La Dame aux camélias*, which appeared four years before the play, he wrote: "I repeat that the story of Marguerite is an exception. If it had been a generality, it would not have been worth while writing." Before many years had passed, Dumas saw that contemporary woman was being caught in the whirlpool of decadent customs and he hastened to remark in 1867: "*La Dame aux camélias*, written fifteen years ago, could no longer be written to-day. Not only would it no longer be true, but it would not even be possible."[7] He still declared himself to be woman's friend, desiring to aid and counsel her; but he had become convinced that the woman of his day was on a downward path and that she could be rescued from destruction only by radical reform in social legislation.

Practically all of the plays of Dumas *fils* written after 1864 are pervaded by the conception that woman was dominating man. Woman, he tells us, will suffer much, provided that her domination is recognized. " 'Curse me, insult me,' says the Woman spectator, 'call me a traitress, a fool, an animal, but recognize my power, suffer on account of me, and prove your servitude by your very revolts and your insults.' "[8] Thus, in his plays, Dumas depicts woman suffering in order that she may prove her power. Diane de Lys undergoes torments, trusting that she may gain Paul's affection and thus establish her domination over him. "No," she declares, "you have been cruel to me, you have insulted me, but what is that beside the fear of no longer being loved?"[9] So also does Suzanne, in *Le Demi-Monde*, suffer violence at the hands of Raymond in order to dominate this guileless individual by her wiles.[10]

"Never, at any time, has Woman affirmed her power as she is doing to-day," declared Dumas.[11] He manifested increasing apprehension; for he believed that the rudder of society was being directed not by the woman of noble instincts, but by what he called the Animal-Woman: "To-day it is different, and the Animal-

[7] *Préface, Dame aux camélias*, I, p. 28.
[8] *Préface, Ami des femmes*, IV, pp. 20-21.
[9] *Diane de Lys*, Act V, sc. 5, 384.
[10] Act IV, sc. 12.
[11] *Préface, Ami des femmes*, IV, p. 25.

Woman, without distinction of birth or education, of race or fortune, is invading modern society."[12] It is this type of woman that de Ryons has in mind when he declares: "It is therefore impossible for me to give myself entirely, as one ought to do in marriage, to one of those charming and terrible carnivora for whom one dishonors himself, or ruins himself, or kills himself, and whose sole preoccupation, in the midst of this universal carnage, is to dress herself in startling colors."[13] Woman, according to Dumas, had become insurgent, refusing to be any longer a wife, companion, friend, slave, or victim: "Woman no longer wishes to be a wife, a companion, a friend, a slave, or a victim in modern society; she is straightway its adversary. She has taken seriously her legendary superiority, and now she is firmly resolved upon devouring Man. . . . There is no longer a single family in the civilized world which, at the present hour, is not compelled to defend itself against this new insurgent, Woman."[14]

The idea of woman insurgent finds development in several of the plays of Dumas *fils*. In *Francillon*, Henri notes that woman, ceasing to accept man as a master, has become his adversary: "The fact remains that the girl of to-day, in whatever social circle she may move, no longer seems disposed to recognize man as her natural and indisputable master."[15] Mistress Clarkson, in *L'Étrangère*, follows a definite policy of "being firmly resolved to devour Man." "Then," she declares, "when I had derived from the folly of those men all that it had to offer, I sent them to what they deserved, to prison, to madness, to murder, or to suicide, . . . allowing myself to be ruled only by my fancy, having my heart, my mind, and my soul full of hatred against what is called Man."[16] In *La Princesse Georges*, Berthe, who considers the adulteress a woman to be scorned, at least finds consolation in the belief that this kind of woman is somewhat justified in her insurgency, for she avenges the unfaithfulness of man: "Those women are on the earth for the despair of woman and for the chastisement of men. They humiliate us, it is true, but they avenge us, and that is a consolation."[17]

[12] *Préface, Ami des femmes*, IV, p. 26.
[13] *Ami des femmes*, Act I, sc. 5, 65.
[14] *Préface, Ami des femmes*, IV, p. 26.
[15] *Francillon*, Act I, sc. 4, 290.
[16] *Étrangère*, Act III, sc. 6, 322.
[17] *Princesse Georges*, Act II, sc. 1, 122.

We also meet, in the plays of Dumas *fils*, the type of woman insurgent who believes that women should unite to defend themselves against man. Madame Guichard, in *Monsieur Alphonse*, adopts this attitude when she says: "We must defend one another against men, must we not? Otherwise they would have too great an advantage."[18] Mistress Clarkson suggests that the only reason that women do not subjugate men more frequently is that they are ignorant of their own power: "When we women have, as I have, the full knowledge of their power, man will cut an inconspicuous figure indeed."[19] Dumas indicates that not only are women ignorant of their own strength, but they also lack a sense of solidarity; for it is, essentially, lack of friendship among women that has contributed to their weakness. Mme de Périgny, in *La Princesse Georges*, doubts that there can actually be true friendship among women, for, as she states, "There is no such thing as a best friend among women. I do not know whether there are even good friends among them."[20] Mathilde, in *Le Supplice d'une femme*, likewise believes friendship among women to be a vain word: "That woman has left me no more doubt: I am either lost or am going to be. With what skill did she torture me! Friendship, thou art then a vain word, like love."[21] In *Le Filleul de Pompignac*, Mme Lombard is the type of woman who, detesting others of her own sex, pretends to be sincerely friendly:

> Madame Lombard: Then I became intimate with those ladies.
> Saint-Élix: And, since you detested them. . . .
> Madame Lombard: I became their friend.[22]

According to Dumas, not only has woman become man's adversary; she has even become a menace to society: "She devours a man's inheritance, a thing which will force property to be built up again through work. She destroys the family, which will necessitate that the family be given new birth through love. She makes of her victims and of herself the dung-hill of which the social land has need for its mysterious germs. When she finds nothing more

[18] *Monsieur Alphonse*, Act I, sc. 7, 106.
[19] *Étrangère*, Act III, sc. 7, 322.
[20] *Princesse Georges*, Act I, sc. 2, 91.
[21] *Supplice d'une femme*, Act II, sc. 4, 80.
[22] *Filleul de Pompignac*, Act I, sc. 1, 12.

to devour, she will die of inanition and disappear, only to be born again under a new form."[23] To this class belongs Mistress Clarkson. So, too, does Valentine de Santis, in *Le Demi-Monde*, who has wrecked her family and has squandered her husband's money. Nor should we forget Sylvanie de Terremonde, in *La Princesse Georges*, of whom Galanson says: "She is of the race of those women of light morals; and now that she has ruined the Count, she passes over to the Prince who has that which she most needs in order to live—money. And all that without the slightest concern for her position in the world, for her honor, for her happiness, for the honor and life of others."[24] De Ryons, in *L'Ami des femmes*, takes good care to keep from the clutches of these women; he, too, believes that the women of his day, though charming, are malefactors, and he refuses to be ensnared by them:

> De Ryons: The woman of to-day is an illogical, inferior, and malevolent creature.
> Madame Leverdet: Then you detest women?
> De Ryons: I? On the contrary, I adore them, but from the other side of the grating, so that they cannot bite me.[25]

To the mind of Dumas *fils*, woman militant represents a hopeless incongruity. His definition of woman is well-known: "Woman is a circumscribed, passive, dependent, subordinate being, living constantly upon future hopes. She is the only unfinished work which God has permitted Man to take up again and complete. She is a fallen angel."[26] With this definition in mind, Dumas is thus a violent opponent of the idea of the emancipation of woman. "Emancipation of woman, renovation of woman, these words which have been dinned into the ears of our century are thus devoid of meaning. . . . Emancipation of Woman by Woman is one of the most hilarious jokes that has ever been born under the sun. It is pure laughing gas; it is sufficient, if you suddenly opened the flask, to make God laugh through all eternity."[27] Quoting a citation from an article by M. de Fourcaud, Dumas calls attention to the fact that emancipation of woman would be a reversal of

[23] *Préface, Ami des femmes*, IV, p. 27.
[24] *Princesse Georges*, Act III, sc. 1, 149.
[25] *Ami des femmes*, Act I, sc. 5, 66-67.
[26] *Préface, Ami des femmes*, IV, p. 45.
[27] *Ibid.*, p. 29.

natural functions equivalent to prostitution: "Any reversal of natural functions is prostitution. Woman, by taking hold of the reins of society which man ought to hold, thereby prostitutes society."[28] Instead of emancipating woman, society should, according to Dumas, subordinate her to man, as man's helpmate: "Now, far from emancipating this person, society, in accordance with the indications of nature, should, on the contrary, ally her, subordinate her, incorporate her with Man, at the same time, however, aiding Man to make himself capable and worthy of this government and of this authority."[29] Evidently Mlle Hackendorf, in *L'Ami des femmes*, voices Dumas' conception of woman's subordination to man when she says to de Ryons: "I have seen only men who are my inferiors, and I need a master. Sacrifice yourself and marry me."[30]

Apparently Dumas believed that woman, instead of seeking emancipation, should graciously resign herself to the decree of man even though she find herself ill-treated; for we find several statements to this effect in his plays. When Diane wishes to rebel against her husband, Marceline counsels resignation: "Courage, Diane! The great strength that we women possess is our resignation."[31] Séverine, in *La Princesse Georges*, is not unlike Diane de Lys. When she discovers the infidelity of her husband, she immediately seeks a method of counter-attack; but her mother advises her to accept the situation with resignation: "The world, and especially our world, is organized like that; neither you nor I can change it."[32]

According to Dumas, one can conceive of woman either as man's inferior or occasionally as his superior, but never as his equal. Upon this point, he states: "As for complete equality with Man, Woman cannot hope for it. Woman can only be inferior or superior to man, but never his equal. . . . The truth is that when Man is strong, Woman is weak; when Man is weak, Woman is strong. In the first case she submits to him, in the second case she suppresses him."[33]

Let us not fall into the error of assuming that Dumas *fils* considers woman to be at fault for her attitude toward man. "Who

[28] *Préface, Étrangère*, VI, p. 216.
[29] *Préface, Ami des femmes*, IV, p. 29.
[30] *Ami des femmes*, Act IV, sc. 5, 166.
[31] *Diane de Lys*, Act IV, sc. 7, 352.
[32] *Princesse Georges*, Act I, sc. 2, 91.
[33] *Préface, Ami des femmes*, IV, pp. 29-30.

is to be blamed for all this?" he asks. "Evidently Man," since we declare him to be the delegate from on high, the earthly mediator, since we contend that he only has a movement of his own and since he has received the mission of carrying along Woman in this movement. When Man advances, Woman progresses; when he stops, she draws back. When he ascends, she accompanies him. When he descends, she falls. We have arrived at this last phase, Man is descending."[34] It is clear, believes Dumas, that man has failed utterly in his mission as the guide of woman. Mme de Périgny, in *La Princesse Georges*, declares: "These men have profited by our allowing them to make laws, and they have framed them in their own favor."[35] "I know," remarks Mme Aubray, "that you are a man, and that you have on your side the law, justice, and force."[36] It is the injustice of these man-made laws that causes Catherine, in *L'Étrangère*, to wish for the death of such a husband as de Septmonts: "As for these laws which men have established, they have made me suffer so much that I no longer care anything more about them. If I were a widow I should be free, and, since I have no children, I should be responsible to no one."[37] As we have seen in preceding chapters, and as we shall observe in the next chapter, Dumas calls constantly for new legislation which shall preclude a separate code of morality for man and woman and which shall restore woman to her proper sphere.

What is the proper sphere of woman? Dumas *fils* does not discourse at length upon this point; but it is quite evident that he believes the function of woman to be motherhood and devotion to the family. He carefully points out the fact that we must not accept 'mother' and 'woman' as synonymous terms. "It is evident," he tells us, "that a mother is a woman, but she is no longer Woman, she is Mother. She has not changed her form, but she has changed her quality. . . . The greatest scorner of women would never despise his own mother, whatever may have been the faults committed by her as a woman. As a woman, she does not exist for him."[38] In this same connection, Mme de Thauzette, in *Denise*, declares: "Mother is independent of woman. In my son I find all

[34] *Préface, Ami des femmes*, IV, p. 51.
[35] *Princesse Georges*, Act I, sc. 2, 91.
[36] *Idées de madame Aubray*, Act II, sc. 4, 263.
[37] *Étrangère*, Act V, sc. 4, 363.
[38] *Préface, Ami des femmes*, IV, p. 8.

the best qualities, and, if he is guilty, every excuse. Mother-love is like that; neither you nor anyone else can change it."[39] Throughout the entire play of *Denise*, Mme de Thauzette is open to censure as a woman; but she is a devoted mother. Strong evidence is also given of the difference between woman and mother in the last two scenes of *La Princesse de Bagdad*. The reader will remember that Lionnette, unable to convince her husband Jean that she has remained faithful to him and, urged by Nourvady to accept a *liaison* with him, is about to yield, completely forgetting her little boy Raoul. She is merely a woman. Suddenly, the little fellow runs in and kisses his mother. She wishes to leave; but the boy refuses to be left behind. Nourvady, impatient, thrusts Raoul aside and causes him to fall. In an instant, Lionnette has again become above all else a mother. Seizing Nourvady by the throat, she almost strangles him and forces him to depart. When Jean returns, Lionnette swears that she is innocent; but Jean remains incredulous. Once again, Lionnette protests her innocence, placing her hand upon the head of Raoul. Jean is now convinced; and the reconciliation of the married couple is brought about through maternal love.

References to mother-love abound in the plays of Dumas. Héloïse Paranquet, after seventeen years of lack of duty toward her child, on the point of committing an infamous act, is checked by her mother-love. "Anything," she agrees, "provided that my daughter be saved . . . and that she call me mother again in that same tone of voice."[40] Paul, in *Diane de Lys*, says, "Alas, madame, my family is composed only of my mother, and I worship her."[41] He reiterates this adoration when he writes to her: "My dear, good mother, there is only one love which never deceives, and that is maternal love."[42] His final words, as he falls dying at the end of the play, are: "My mother!" In *La Question d'argent*, René has little money with which to purchase a wedding gift for Élisa. His adoration for his mother, long since dead, is admirably portrayed by his action of offering to Élisa that which is most precious to him, a ring containing strands of his mother's hair.

[39] *Denise*, Act III, sc. 2, 199.
[40] *Héloïse Paranquet*, Act IV, sc. 7, 283.
[41] *Diane de Lys*, Act II, sc. 9, 280.
[42] *Ibid.*, Act V, sc. 4, 379.

Raymond, in *Le Demi-Monde*, says to Suzanne: "I was ten years old when I lost my mother whom I adored and, however young one may be, he becomes old the day that he loses his mother."[43]

It is to the task of rehabilitating motherhood and the family in France that Dumas urges the legislator. "Woman," he declares, "is going through a terrible crisis. The wife that I suggest for you is difficult to find. Where is the young girl, where is the virgin depicted by Solomon? Where is the fiancée whom Lamartine told us to choose,

. . . . . Éclose
Parmi les lis de nos vallons?

The wind has blown over the valleys as over the mountains and has spread the lilies among the stones of the road. Those who passed by have trampled upon them. There are no more wives! There are no more mothers! There are no more children!"[44]

From the contents of this chapter, it will be seen that it is a dismal picture of contemporary womanhood that Dumas has painted for us. Counsellor of woman, solicitous of her welfare, he hastened to admonish her that her insurgency would cause her downfall, a ruin imminent enough through the moral laxity into which she had fallen. Caught in the vortex of loose living, she had ceased to be the companion of man and had drifted from her natural sphere of family life. She demanded her emancipation, little realizing, as Dumas believed, that God had given to man alone the authority and the right to guide her, for she must always remain subordinate to man. Upon man himself, Dumas placed the blame for the condition and the attitude of mind of the woman of his day. Perverting his function as leader of woman, man had, in framing the laws of society, consulted his own selfish interests and his own masculine methods of thinking. Upon man, therefore, devolved the task of reorganizing social laws, of abolishing a dual standard of morality, of bringing woman back to the family fireside, and of making of her a true wife and a true mother.

[43] *Demi-Monde*, Act II, sc. 3, 79. [44] *Préface*, *Ami des femmes*, IV, p. 50.

CHAPTER XI

THE IDEAS OF DUMAS CONCERNING THE MANNERS OF HIS DAY

THROUGHOUT the three phases of his dramatic career, the attitude of Dumas *fils* toward contemporary manners undergoes a very natural process of evolution. The success of the *Demi-Monde*, written during the first stage of his career, is attributable principally to the fact that for the first time Dumas directed his keen observation toward a corner of society that had not yet been given serious attention on the theatrical stage. In this play, however, he made no attempt to preach reform; he indicated dangers which might ensue, but left predication to others. In the second stage of his career, he felt himself impelled to suggest reforms and to appeal for alteration of the laws then in force. To him this seemed a most logical procedure for, as he tells us, "It is impossible for a man endowed with observation, with reflection, with a sense of justice, and with an ideal, who makes use of the stage to express his thought, not to arrive progressively at the point of treating through the theater the fundamental questions which interest all humanity."[1] In the third stage of his career, somewhat weary, perhaps, with constant efforts which produced no results, he depicted man taking the law into his own hands.

He early indicated that the French people are highly illogical and erratic in their conduct, manners, and laws: "In truth we are a curious people. Our only claim to intelligence is to have made others believe that we have any; for there is no trace in our manners, in our acts, or even in our laws, of true sense of conduct, of appreciation, of justice, or of good sense."[2] To some extent, this erratic nature of the French is indicated by Jacques, in *Le Fils naturel*, when he describes the fickleness of their hero-worship: "We should exaggerate nothing. In France we are so; we extol to the clouds new men and then, without any warning, we let them

[1] *Théâtre complet*, vol. VIII, *Notes inédites*, p. 143.

[2] *A propos de la dame aux camélias*, I, pp. 37-38.

fall in order to run to someone else."[3] Dumas felt convinced that lack of stability had caused many social evils among his people; and we shall see that he believed the moral standards of his own day to be very far below normal. "Pleasure or death,"[4] he asserts, has become the watch-word of France. "Sensation, that is life!"[5] cries Fernand in *Denise;* and, in the same play, André expresses his disgust over contemporary customs by saying, "I do not know what to think of contemporary society. I can understand that a delicate and fine nature cannot refrain from having an instinctive disgust over it and wishes to go straight to God without passing through what we see."[6]

According to Dumas, decadence was apparent even in the language of the day: "The beautiful French language is in full carnival; it runs through the streets like a madwoman, making grimaces and somersaults in order to attract the populace and steal popularity."[7] Thérèse, in *Francillon,* declares that even in so-called good society the moral tone of conversation is highly objectionable: "Francine is right. I do not know whence comes the habit that good society has of saying vulgar things about bad society."[8] If we are to believe Dumas, all France looked on, with little thought of arresting the general decay, too absorbed in the pursuit of pleasure. *"Va bene!"* he expostulates. "Long live love! Let woman do what she is doing and, in fifty years at the most, our nephews (we shall have no more children, we shall have only nephews), our nephews, I say, will see what will remain of the family, of religion, of virtue, of morality, and of marriage in our beautiful country of France, all the cities of which will have wide streets with public squares in the middle of which it will be proper to erect statues dedicated to Useless Truths."[9] Finding such conditions surrounding her, Marthe, in *Denise,* sees quite enough of the world in the few months after she leaves her convent, and she longs to return to its seclusion: "You wished me to see the world before pronouncing my vows, my dear André. Well, I have seen it. In truth, it is not pretty. In a few months, I have seen so much evil and I have done so much evil myself that I am

[3] *Fils naturel,* Act IV, sc. 6, 194.
[4] *Préface, Ami des femmes,* IV, p. 52.
[5] *Denise,* Act I, sc. 2, 131.
[6] *Ibid.,* Act I, sc. 4, 135.
[7] *Préface, Ami des femmes,* IV, p. 52.
[8] *Francillon,* Act I, sc. 3, 276.
[9] *A propos de la dame aux camélias,* I, pp. 50-51.

eager to return to the convent."[10] Other characters in the plays of Dumas *fils* have not the strength of Denise to break away from the conditions which surround them. They admit their shortcomings, but excuse their actions by asserting that there are many others like themselves. It is thus that Lionnette seeks to absolve herself of blame: "I am following my destiny quite logically. I shall not be the first woman to wear her shame publicly, like a plume, especially in these days."[11] Octave, in *Monsieur Alphonse*, finds a similar excuse for his egoism and his scepticism: "When one is in Rome one must do as the Romans do; and when one lives in an egoistical and sceptical age he must make himself, at least in appearance, more egoistical and more sceptical than others."[12]

"One of the errors of our day," affirmed Dumas, "is to believe that one can arrest destruction mid-way in its course and reconstruct with that which is bound to die."[13] That he believed this destruction to be well under way is evident from the speech of Cantagnac who says, "I know that everyone is looking out for his own interests and thinks that it is the proper thing to do. I know that women who wish only to follow their instincts and their fancies, end by colliding with situations which they cannot overcome, particularly when, as to-day, the artificial world which protected them is crumbling in all of its parts."[14]

Dumas indicates that woman follows in private life man's miserable actions in public life, and to her he predicts: "Your false power will fall, your mythological sovereignty will vanish with the sickly literature that is born of you."[15] Women are not alone to blame; for both contemporary man and woman are morally on the decline: "At the present moment, Man is descending. He no longer knows where he is. He admits no authority. He proclaims moral independence."[16]

To the young girl, the evils which surround her are a great menace. "I know," says Mme Aubray, "what dangers, what struggles, what relapses await the young girl who remains alone in the midst of our modern society."[17] The women among whom she moves

[10] *Denise*, Act IV, sc. 5, 243.
[11] *Princesse de Bagdad*, Act III, sc. 3, 75.
[12] *Monsieur Alphonse*, Act I, sc. 3, 86.
[13] *Préface, Ami des femmes*, IV, p. 53.
[14] *Femme de Claude*, Act I, sc. 6, 269.
[15] *Préface, Ami des femmes*, IV, p. 55.
[16] *Ibid.*, p. 51.
[17] *Idées de madame Aubray*, Act I, sc. 5, 244.

offer her a bad example. Both Francine, in *Francillon*, and Séverine, in *La Princesse Georges*, smoke in public. Several allusions are made in the plays to the indecency of their dress. Dumas speaks of it in a preface, declaring that "woman props herself up on her Louis XV heels, with her skirts up to her knees and her dress cut down to the waist-line."[18] Comments upon it are made in several of the plays. In *Un Père prodigue*, André declares: "It is through her low-necked dresses that woman's modesty is evaporating little by little. Don't you realize that the murmur of admiration that caresses your bare shoulders is only a disguised insult? If I were a woman, I should judge the sincerity of the man who declared that he loved me by the kind of corsage that he would permit me to wear."[19]

Dumas tells us, furthermore, that decadence has arrived in not only one, but in all classes of society. Even the bourgeoisie, which he usually depicts in a favorable light, has been caught in the whirlpool. With this class, the chief obsession is money. "The important thing," he states, "is to get rich quickly";[20] and he repeats the idea on many occasions in his plays. Nourvady says that "with money one can find out anything he wishes to know."[21] Lionnette affirms that "money is everything in the world."[22] According to Jean Giraud, "to-day a man must have only one purpose, to become very rich." "As for me," he declares, "that has always been my idea. I have succeeded and I am proud of it."[23] Mistress Clarkson tells us: "Since the beginning of the world, men have invented many gods, but they have not dethroned the god of money. 'Time is money,' say your compatriots; they should have added, 'and money is everything.' . . . As for that power, I declare it to be the first in the world."[24]

The universal power attributed to money has, according to Dumas, led men to use it for doubtful purposes. Men who have illegitimate children expect to atone for their faults through the mere payment of a sum of money. In *Héloïse Paranquet*, Héloïse and Guy de Sableuse are the parents of an illegitimate child. Guy's family refuses to countenance the idea of marriage, believing that

[18] *Préface, Ami des femmes*, IV, p. 52.
[19] *Père prodigue*, Act III, sc. 1, 317.
[20] *A propos de la dame aux camélias*, I, p. 30.
[21] *Princesse de Bagdad*, Act I, sc. 2, 30.
[22] *Ibid.*, Act III, sc. 3, 73.
[23] *Question d'argent*, Act I, sc. 4, 253.
[24] *Étrangère*, Act III, sc. 1, 306.

Héloïse will accept money as a solace. To this, she protests: "But the Viscount Guy de Sableuse owes himself to his family; his family of an earlier generation, of course, the one which he received by chance. But the family of his affections, his family of the future, matters little to him. Money arranges everything."[25] With an exaggerated value attached to money, small consideration is given to honesty. In spite of his warped views, Jean Giraud echoes the opinion of Dumas when he declares: "Do you know what the faculties which God has given you are worth at the present time? The price is established just as it is for little biscuits. Courage is worth one cent a day if you wish to become a soldier; intelligence, one hundred francs a month if you wish to be a clerk; honesty, three thousand francs a year if you succeed in becoming a teller."[26] A person who, being honest, has been duped by a man who prides himself upon his cleverness, is chided for his probity. It is de Roncourt who says: "Do you know what that business man had the impertience to tell me? He said, 'So much the worse for you; it is your fault; you have been too honest.'"[27] Honesty is thus forgotten as all classes of society seek to enrich themselves. René, in *La Question d'argent*, attacking Jean Giraud's lack of moral sense in financial transactions, tells him: "You wished to acquire consideration through money. It is just the opposite that you should have attempted—you should have tried to acquire money through consideration."[28] But the views of René would hardly receive recognition among his contemporaries. He is the example of the old nobility, whose sense of honor is held in scorn by the newer generation of nobles.

Dumas indicates that this newer nobility is everywhere on the decline. In *L'Étrangère*, Mauriceau tells Rémonin that it is the bourgeoisie alone that has kept the old nobility alive. "All that nobility," he affirms, "is decaying piece by piece; and, if we did not come along from time to time and infuse into it our bourgeois money and our bourgeois blood, there would soon remain nothing of it."[29] Mistress Clarkson, too, predicts the end of the nobility when she says to Catherine de Septmonts, "I do not believe that,

[25] *Héloïse Paranquet*, Act I, sc. 3, 210.
[26] *Question d'argent*, Act III, sc. 4, 321.
[27] *Ibid.*, sc. 3, 316.
[28] *Ibid.*, Act V, sc. 8, 386.
[29] *Étrangère*, Act I, sc. 1, 235.

in a very short time from now, your world will exist any longer."[30] The nobles of Dumas' generation seem to have completely forgotten the code of honor which was the pride of their ancestors. Witness the degradation of the prince de Birac, of whom Séverine says: "How can one lie so abominably? A *grand seigneur* with eight hundred years of nobility behind him and of whom all one asks is that he be a respectable man. And he cannot! and he lies!"[31]

The antidote which Dumas suggests for the demoralization of society, particularly of the nobility, is work. The gods of money and of idleness must be dethroned; the god of industry must be worshipped. When the marchioness, in *Le Fils naturel*, is greatly displeased that her son has entered the ship-building industry, her brother remonstrates, "My sister, let us prove our good birth by the good qualities and not by the exaggerations of the nobility. Do not bear a grudge against your son for having attached his name to an honorable industry."[32] Upon the conception of making the nobility work, de Cayolle builds up a most interesting scheme to which he gives the name of 'civil conscription':

> This civil conscription is my own idea and it is the simplest thing in the world. It would serve as a counterpart to military conscription and might even replace it, for it is probable that, within a given time, all peoples will be united by common interests, by the arts, by commerce, by industry, and that war will disappear from the world. Then society will no longer ask of men anything more than the tribute of their intellectual capacities. When a man reaches the age of twenty-one, the State will come to him and say, "What career have you decided upon? What are you doing for other men?"—"Nothing."—"Oh, you wish to work?"—"No, I do not wish to do anything."—"Very good; then you have a fortune?"—"Yes."—"Well, you are free not to work, but then you must find a substitute. You will have to give so much per year to those people who, having no fortune, will be working in your stead, and we shall give you a laziness card with which you may circulate freely."[33]

"In time of prosperity," says Dumont, "work is a duty; in time of misfortune it is a refuge."[34] The marquis, in *Le Fils naturel*,

[30] *Étrangère*, Act III, sc. 7, p. 319.
[31] *Princesse Georges*, Act I, sc. 2, 94-95.
[32] *Fils naturel*, Act I, sc. 5, 90.
[33] *Question d'argent*, Act III, sc. 1, 310-311.
[34] *Supplice d'une femme*, Act III, sc. 3, 105.

whose words we quoted a moment ago and who is one of the few examples in the plays of Dumas of the good type of the old nobility, is a thorough believer in the power of work to urge man on to great accomplishments. He declares:

> Anything may be expected of a worthy man to whom misfortune has given courage and ambition. This is an additional proof that we must evaluate a man only by his work, whatever be his origin. Who knows whether that child of the people who is running around in bare feet in the street with the children of his own age may not some day add a great discovery to the catalogue of humanity? Who knows whether that poor little creature whose weeping mother has had his name enrolled on the list of nameless children may not carry in his brain the destiny of a world![35]

In this same play, Jacques expresses an analogous idea when he says, "And then the most sorrowful events sometimes have a good result. Often an unexpected sorrow, an unjust misfortune, give to a man an energy and a perseverance which he would never have found, perhaps, in good fortune. Sometimes a person has become a superior man after having suffered, who would have been only a common man if he had always been happy."[36]

Glancing back over the opinions of Dumas concerning the manners of his day, we find that his arraignment of society is severe. Starting with the hypothesis that the French people are illogical and unstable, he indicates that they have given themselves over abnormally to the pursuit of pleasure. A low standard of morality is observed both in the language and in the actions of his fellow men who seek to excuse their misdeeds by asserting that they are no worse than their neighbors. Women smoke in public and are indecent in their manner of dress; but men are equally culpable, and women are merely following in private life the misconduct of men in public life. A false evaluation of the importance of money is the cause of much of the existing evil, for with it goes a corresponding lack of esteem for honesty. There is not a single class of society into which these evil conditions have not spread; but the nobility is most conspicuous in its shortcomings. The sense

[35] *Fils naturel*, Act IV, sc. 5, 185. [36] *Ibid.*, Act III, sc. 5, 153.

of honor of the old nobility seems lost; and, to the idle and dishonorable descendants of erstwhile great families, Dumas suggests work as a means of regeneration and redemption.

Such is the picture of life in France as Dumas visualized it. What is the picture of conditions as he would have them? In this connection, it will not, perhaps, be entirely out of place to quote from the preface to his collected plays the advice which he offers to his fellow men, admonitions which, if scrupulously heeded, would doubtless bring to realization Dumas' dream of a reconstructed society:

> Walk two hours every day, sleep seven hours every night. Go to bed, always alone, as soon as you are fatigued. Get up as soon as you awaken. Start work as soon as you arise. Eat only according to your hunger; drink only according to your thirst, and always slowly. Speak only when necessary, and say only half of what you think. Write only what you can sign, and do only what you can say. Never forget that others will count upon you, and that you must not count upon them. Esteem money at neither more nor less than what it is worth: it is a good servant but a bad master. Keep from women before the age of twenty and after forty. Do not create anything without the full knowledge of that to which you have pledged yourself, and destroy as little as possible. Pardon everybody in advance, in order to be more sure. Do not scorn men, do not hate them, and do not make fun of them in immoderate measure: pity them. Think of death every morning when you see the light and every evening when you walk in the shadows. When you have suffered much, look sorrow in the face; she herself will console you and teach you something. Try to be simple, to become useful, and wait, before denying God, until it has been absolutely proven to you that He does not exist.[37]

[37] *Au lecteur*, I, p. 4.

CHAPTER XII

THE IDEAS OF DUMAS CONCERNING SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Marriage and Divorce

IN all of the plays of Dumas *fils*, there is depicted but one instance of conjugal happiness, that of Aristide in *Le Fils naturel*. Other instances receive mention, but have no essential bearing upon the main action of the play. Mme Aubray had lived happily with her husband; but she is a widow at the time that the play begins. Mme Périgny, in *La Princesse Georges*, had been happy in her first marriage; but she has remarried before the commencement of the play, and this second marriage has been unhappy. Thouvenin, in *Denise*, had married for love and had lived in peace and contentment; but he is already a widower when the play commences. The comforts of married life, Dumas tells us, no longer exist: "Marriage implies repose, intimacy, family life, dignity, and love. Repose! I shall have to take my wife to the race-track, to the opera, to dances, to watering-places. Intimacy! During the few hours which we may have together, she will wish to remain alone. Family life! When shall we have time to have any children . . . ? Dignity! Where is the dignity of a woman who wears a dress cut down to the waist-line? Love! It is useless to speak of it since it has its life through all of those things. My wife will thus belong to everyone else except to me."[1]

It is conditions such as these that Dumas depicts in his plays. In vain does Valentine, in *La Princesse Georges*, wait for her husband to return from Italy. "My husband," she declares, "was to have returned from Italy in the month of October and here we are in May. He gambles whenever he has the opportunity."[2] In the same play, the Baron and the Baroness have difficulty in finding any time for domestic life:

THE BARONESS: Until tomorrow, then?

[1] *A propos de la dame aux camélias*, I, p. 32.

[2] *Princesse Georges*, Act II, sc. 2, 126.

THE BARON: Until tomorrow. (*Coming back.*) Oh! no. Tomorrow is Thursday. I am going hunting with Champclos and I have to leave early.

THE BARONESS: Until day after tomorrow, then. Well, anyway, I shall see you some day soon.[3]

We must not conclude that Dumas did not believe in marriage. He accepted marriage as divine, but was of the opinion that man was responsible for the evils existing in married life. "Marriage," he writes, "is divine in its principle, divine in its purpose, but fallible in its results, inasmuch as it is frequently misused in its application just as everything that has man as its agent."[4]

Dumas is of the opinion that society is greatly to blame for marital infelicity; for it immediately starts to gossip about a girl who does not marry at an early age. "It is established," he states, "that a young girl must always marry, under penalty of being considered a problem or of having had some scandal attached to her life."[5] Realizing this, Élisa, in *La Question d'argent*, answers to René's protest that she is still a young woman at the age of twenty-four, "No, I am an old maid."[6]

With society entertaining such opinions, it is natural that parents should urge their daughters to marry hastily; and these children, accustomed to consider the dictates of society and of their parents beneficial to their welfare, acquiesce. "Why did I marry you?" Lionnette asks Jean in *La Princesse de Bagdad*. "Because your mother advised you to do so," replies her husband.[7] We find a similar situation in *Diane de Lys*. "Why," demands Maximilien, "did you marry the Count after the promises which you made to me?" To this Diane responds, "Has one a will at the age of seventeen? My father and my mother wished me to marry him; and I obeyed. But I assure you that I wept a great deal."[8]

In their precipitous haste to secure a husband for their daughter, parents neglect, or at times purposely avoid, the duty of enlightening her concerning the demands of married life. She enters into marriage, and consequently into motherhood, with no knowledge

[3] *Princesse Georges*, Act III, sc. 2, 125.
[4] *Préface, Ami des femmes*, IV, pp. 48-49.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 36.
[6] *Question d'argent*, Act II, sc. 5, 283.
[7] *Princesse de Bagdad*, Act I, sc. 2, 23.
[8] *Diane de Lys*, Act I, sc. 6, 240.

of what is before her. Thus, Fernande, in *Une Visite de noces*, remarks, "He weighed ten pounds when he came into the world, isn't that so, Gaston. It is you who weighed him. If you knew how I suffered! I thought that I was going to die! A girl does not know all that when she marries."[9] It is an egregious wrong that these parents commit when they neglect to instruct their daughter concerning the exigencies of matrimony. In *L'Ami des femmes*, Jane gives a lengthy but very striking picture of the results of this reticence on the part of the parents, and clearly indicates that the ignorance of the bride may cause irreparable harm:

Then you will not understand me, for you cannot know the feelings of a young girl reared as I was. She hears marriage spoken of without the slightest idea of its true meaning. She sees only the union of two persons who, loving each other, wish to spend their life together in the same manner as her father and mother, who speak formally to each other, and do not even kiss each other in her presence. With this union she associates the idea of the country, travels, the pleasure of being a woman of society, the pride of being called Madame. One day she meets a young man who pays her more attention than he does to other girls and who thus reveals to her the fact that she is a woman who has arrived at the age when she may be loved. It is the first time that she is not inclined to laugh. Her heart beats quickly. This man asks the mother for the daughter's hand. He is accepted. He may now pay court to her. Nature, poetry, music, and flowers become their intermediaries. From time to time a smile, a pressure of the hand. In the evening, sweet reverie; at night a chaste dream. The ideal, always the ideal. Finally, after a religious ceremony in which the angels themselves seem to pay court to her, the pious, romantic, ignorant child finds herself delivered over to that man who well indeed knows what love is. What becomes of the modesty, of the dreams, of the chastity of this young girl as she falls from heaven back upon the earth? Many women close their eyes and take refuge in maternity. These are sturdy souls, steeped in the sources of nature, who do not dispute the work of God. But there are some who become panic-stricken, who revolt, and all the feelings with which they have been fortified up to that moment come and group themselves around them and demand a surcease from reality. Then the husband, somewhat arrogant and impatient in his quality of man, goes to transfer to the first woman whom he meets that love which his bride had judged unworthy of her but of which she becomes jealous, nevertheless, because she is a woman. She returns to her mother, her life is broken,

[9] *Visite de noces*, sc. 2, 26.

and the world looks at her in astonishment, follows her with doubt, gradually begins to calumniate her, and finally repulses her, for no woman has the right to be different from others.[10]

In contrast with the parents of Jane, we have the farsighted Daniel, a Jew, who follows his own ideas concerning the enlightenment of young girls on marriage and whose views might be considered a lesson to the so-called Christians who surround him:

I think that people make a mistake in the manner in which they bring up their daughters. One should tell girls the truth about things just as one does to men. The ignorance in which they are left often comes from the fact that the parents themselves do not know the causes and the ends of things, or else they haven't the time, or else they have lost, through their own passions or their own errors, the right to tell everything to their children. My wife was the most worthy woman on this earth. As for me, I am a respectable man. Our daughter comes from us. When Rebecca arrived at the age of understanding, I opened full wide before her the book of nature and I explained to her simply and loyally. Everything that God has done is noble, and there is not a single human soul, not even the soul of a virgin, that has the right to be shocked at it.[11]

Lack of domestic tranquillity and retention of parental example and advice invite disaster. Such is the story of Paul's youth which he tells us in his own words:

Finally I left school. My father gave me sufficient spending money, and I attempted several different careers. But advice, affection, surveillance, and family solidarity were not present. I formed bad acquaintanceships among both men and women; I took on evil habits; and I contracted debts. In the midst of all this irregular living, I fell in love with a beautiful, respectable young girl. She was poor and I had nothing. Since my father refused to give me anything, I was forced to give her up; and despair cast me lower and lower into the abyss from which you have just rescued me. That is my confession.[12]

Frequently unhappy marriages are caused because parents seek a noble title in the marriage of their daughters. In reviewing the blighted romance of Catherine, Rémonin says: "Mlle Mauriceau

[10] *Ami des femmes*, Act IV, sc. 9, 176-177.

[11] *Femme de Claude*, Act II, sc. 1, 277.

[12] *Filleul de Pompignac*, Act II, sc. 5, 64-65.

also wished to marry according to her origin and her affections; but her father had allowed his head to be filled with ambitions toward the nobility. . . . She became a Duchess and she remained unhappy."[13] Occasionally, the insistence on the part of parents of noble birth that their daughter choose a nobleman for a husband, regardless of his character, produces equally disastrous results. Mme de Périgny is such a mother; and she shows little concern when she confesses: "I married you to that man because, when one has daughters, one has to marry them. We don't know much about the husbands who present themselves, nor can we find out much about their character."[14] That marriages of this kind are doomed to failure is the opinion of Catherine who claims that such unions are formed by "the ambition of the father, the ignorance of the bride, and the baseness of the husband."[15]

The spirit of the pursuit of money in Dumas' generation also had, as we might expect, a great effect upon the marriage question, if we are to believe the statements of Dumas. In the mad desire of accumulating wealth, people seized upon the marriage for money as the most rapid and simplest way of gaining riches. Dumas tells us that society approves the marriage of a young girl with a wealthy man old enough to be her father or even her grandfather, sanctions and even considers to be a good business proposition the marriage of a penniless young nobleman with the daughter of a man who has accumulated his fortune in the liquor business, but deems idiotic the marriage of a man of means or of noble birth with a poverty-stricken young girl who has remained pure and innocent. He summarizes his statements and points to the root of the matter by declaring: "Then money is your real reason."[16] The marriage for money in all of its phases assumes a huge rôle in the plays of Dumas *fils*. The dramatist emphasizes the fact that a young girl without a fortune has very little chance of marrying; for, as Hersilie states: "That is the story of all girls who do not possess a fortune. Men love them very seriously at times, but never marry them."[17] Thouvenin reiterates this statement when he declares: "Well, that is the story of the poor young girl. They may be in

[13] *Étrangère*, Act II, sc. 1, 263.
[14] *Princesse Georges*, Act III, sc. 1, 151.
[15] *Étrangère*, Act IV, sc. 5, 348.
[16] *A propos de la dame aux camélias*, I, p. 22.
[17] *Filleul de Pompignac*, Act I, sc. 3, 24.

love, but men do not marry them,"[18] and Élisa expresses the same thought when she laments, "I did not marry, for a girl without a dowry cannot marry."[19] "To-day," states Dumas, "both girls and parents, when a husband is mentioned, ask, 'How much has he?' "[20]

Thus, instances of marriage for money abound in the plays of Dumas; and we shall have to limit ourselves to the citation of the most conspicuous examples. How strongly the author disapproves of wedlock in which money is the prime consideration is well illustrated by Mauriceau, in *L'Étrangère*. "Frankly," he declares, "one does not earn twenty million francs in business to give them to the son of his daughter's governess."[21] Instead, he delights in arranging a marriage which will bring both wealth and a title into the family: "That is very convenient, my daughter; marriage changes your name. The Duchess of Septmonts, that expresses everything! To-day we are a Duchess, a real Duchess. We have bought seven hundred years of nobility in five minutes."[22] Later, however, Mauriceau undergoes a complete change of mind and wishes that he had permitted his daughter to follow her own inclinations: "My daughter loved a respectable man and this respectable man loved her. It was a very simple matter; I should have let them marry. But I, fool that I was, could not see that. And now I am the cause that that respectable man may be killed and that my daughter may also die on account of it."[23]

The only character in the plays of Dumas who regrets that he married for love instead of for money is Durieu; but he is depicted throughout the play as an illogical man whose opinions count for naught. "No," he states, "but your aunt had no dowry, and I married her for herself alone. It is a foolish thing that I did."[24] The more stable characters of Dumas, particularly his *raisonneurs*, cannot tolerate the thought of marriage for money alone. Thouvenin declares: "I married a beautiful, good, honest girl who did not have a cent and did not expect ever to have any money. I thank God every day for the good idea that I had in doing so."[25]

[18] *Denise*, Act II, sc. 2, 161.
[19] *Question d'argent*, Act I, sc. 8, 265.
[20] *A propos de la dame aux camélias*, I, p. 31.
[21] *Étrangère*, Act I, sc. 1, 235.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 236.
[23] *Ibid.*, Act V, sc. 3, 360.
[24] *Question d'argent*, Act II, sc. 3, 273.
[25] *Denise*, Act II, sc. 2, 159.

When the Countess tells René that he will marry a rich woman, he replies, "I do not wish to sell myself."[26] In remonstrating with Monsieur Alphonse, Montaiglin declares, "And yet, if she were not rich, if she did not have forty or fifty thousand francs income, you probably would not have looked at her. You are therefore making a business proposition of it, which I just a moment ago termed an ugly thing."[27]

Dumas openly brands the marriage for money with the name of prostitution: ". . . when only money is considered in the approach of man and woman, there is bartering, and this bartering is nothing less than out-and-out prostitution."[28] He believes this to be true particularly when the bride is destitute. Under these circumstances, she is bought rather than married, for, as Élisa says, ". . . you do not marry a poor girl, you buy her."[29] Not only is such a marriage in itself prostitution; but it may lead to prostitution. This is the case with Mlle de Santis, who married for wealth and immediately became an adulteress since she had no love for the husband who had led her to the altar:

HIPPOLYTE: She was charming, I must confess. They called her 'the beautiful Mlle de Santis.' Not a cent of fortune. The suitor was rich; he was in love; he was young. He was very timid and did not dare ask for her hand. One of his friends, who had introduced him into the house, offered to make the request in his name. He accepted. The marriage took place. The friend was one of the two witnesses for the groom.

OLIVIER: And you were the other?

HIPPOLYTE: Yes. Six months after his marriage, the husband came to me. He had proof that his wife was the mistress of the wretch who had arranged the marriage.[30]

On the other hand, Dumas sincerely believed in marriage for love alone, as some of the above passages partially indicate. As Aristide declares in *Le Fils naturel*, it matters little whether the bride and groom belong to the same class of society: "Marry when you are young and healthy; choose, from any class of society, a good, honest, healthy girl; love her with all your soul and with all your strength; make of her a reliable companion and a fecund

[26] *Question d'argent*, Act I, sc. 2, 235.
[27] *Monsieur Alphonse*, Act I, sc. 3, 89.
[28] *A propos de la dame aux camélias*, I, p. 31.
[29] *Question d'argent*, Act III, sc. 5, 326.
[30] *Demi-Monde*, Act I, sc. 3, 40-41.

mother; work to bring up your children; and, when you die, leave behind the example of a good life. That is the truth. The rest is only crime, error, and folly."[31] Hélène, also, in *Un Père prodigue*, does not see the necessity of choosing one's life partner from one's own social circle: "Well, my dear aunt, the day when I find such a man—so much the better if he is of my own caste, little does it matter if he is not—I shall marry him."[32]

Love, and love alone, is to be considered in marriage. Thouvenin maintains that "The truth, the absolute truth . . . is to associate one's self for life and for eternity with only one woman, the one whom one marries, and to have only one reason for marrying—love."[33] Henriette suggests a marriage of this kind for Hermine, at the same time stressing the fact that marriages for love are rare: "I do not see what there is that is so extraordinary in attempting to have a girl marry according to her heart. . . . It would be good to see such a marriage from time to time, were it only to cause other marriages to be pardoned."[34] In the same play, the marquis offers identical advice when he says, "The main thing is that he be a respectable man, that he love Hermine, and that she love him."[35] In *Un Père prodigue*, Hélène asserts that she will marry no one but the man she loves and only if he loves her. The Marchioness declares that she will never find such a husband; but, as events turn out, she succeeds in spite of the prediction of the Marchioness.

As we cast a retrospective glance over the views of Dumas on marriage, before proceeding to the second part of our chapter, we note that he is utterly out of sympathy with the views of contemporary society on the subject of wedlock. He condemns parents who urge their immature daughters into matrimony for fear that people may think that there is some opprobrious reason for their state of celibacy. He stresses the importance of informing young women upon the exigencies of married life before the wedding takes place. He manifests his hearty disapproval of the actions of those parents who utilize the marriage of their children for the furtherance of their own ambitions. He looks with contempt upon

[31] *Fils naturel*, Act III, sc. 1, 130.
[32] *Père prodigue*, Act II, sc. 9, 311.
[33] *Denise*, Act IV, sc. 3, 233.
[34] *Fils naturel*, Act I, sc. 5, 87.
[35] *Ibid.*, p. 90.

the very frequent marriage in which wealth alone is considered. This type of marriage he believes to be the equivalent of prostitution, and states that love alone should be the determining factor in wedlock.

At the time when Dumas was writing his earlier plays, the French law refused to recognize divorce, permitting separation only. Concerning this situation, Dumas declares, "It is stupid, it is immoral, it is unclean; but it is agreed upon and it is even sometimes applauded."[36] He points out the fact that the social law of his day and the teachings of the Gospel are at great variance on this fundamental question; for the divine law sanctioned divorce in case of adultery, whereas the contemporary French law permits, under these circumstances, only separation. Quoting from the Sermon on the Mount he states: "Jesus said, 'But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, *saving for the cause of fornication*,[37] causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.' Therefore, the divine law advocates divorce in the case of adultery; therefore, the human law, not even admitting this case, is at odds with the divine law."[38] In *L'Ami des femmes*, Mme Leverdet explains the inadequacy of separation as a solution for marital difficulties; for, in the case of separation, woman suffers, but man's wrongs are soon forgotten. "All that remains," she says, "is a woman separated from her husband, which is an abnormal state, regrettable in our society, and little by little reaction takes place. The fault of the husband becomes, with time, a mere bagatelle which did not deserve the discussion that it caused; and the constant aloofness of the wife, particularly when the husband attempts a reconciliation, seems hard to explain. People seek reasons other than those given; and, if they do not find any, they begin to make suppositions."[39]

Throughout his plays, Dumas makes frequent references to the inflexibility of the laws governing divorce. Mme Lombard observes that, under existing conditions, marriage may mean life im-

[36] *A M. Cuvillier-Fleury*, V, p. 220.
[37] The version in French reads, "si ce n'est en cas d'adultère."
[38] *A M. Cuvillier-Fleury*, V, p. 217.
[39] *Ami des femmes*, Act I, sc. 8, 86.

prisonment when she says, "There is no escape in marriage. It is a refuge which has doors made of iron bars, and the law holds the keys. When you are inside, you have to stay there. You have cast yourself with your eyes closed into an abyss, the depths of which I well know, I who escaped somewhat tardily."[40] Séverine, in *La Princesse Georges*, is perhaps the most conspicuous example of the woman who suffers because of the rigidity of the divorce law. Seeking a means of being freed from her husband, she appeals to her mother, only to receive the reply: "My, my, how you go about things! Don't you know that you cannot break a marriage?"[41] Receiving no consolation from her mother, Séverine appeals to her lawyer, only to discover that the law of indissoluble marriage has condemned her to live out her entire existence with her husband, an adulterer:

GALANSON: When your husband has left you you may make a legal statement of his departure, under what conditions this departure took place, the use to which your husband put the half of your fortune, his public relations with another woman, and we shall demand a separation of persons and of goods which I think we may be able to obtain.

SÉVERINE: And then?

GALANSON: You will wait until your husband either comes back or dies.

SÉVERINE: That is a long while.

GALANSON: Things might stay that way forever.

SÉVERINE: Then that is all that men have discovered to protect those who are their mothers, their sisters, their wives, and their daughters?

GALANSON: That is all.[42]

The possible consequences of such laws are clearly depicted in *La Femme de Claude*. In this play, Claude, realizing that the law will not permit him to get rid of his adulterous wife, and finding in her a menace not only to himself but also to his country, takes the law into his own hands and kills her. Dumas justifies this dénouement, so greatly criticized by his contemporaries, by appealing for the reform of the law which drives a man like Claude to such extremes. He declares that "it is a law to be revised which did not foresee that a man like Claude could be chained for life to a monster like Césarine."[43]

[40] *Filleul de Pompignac*, Act III, sc. 3, 72.

[41] *Princesse Georges*, Act I, sc. 2, 93.

[42] *Ibid.*, Act III, sc. 1, 150-151.

[43] *A M. Cuvillier-Fleury*, V, p. 216.

Both *La Femme de Claude* and its preface were written in 1873. Three years later, Dumas produced *L'Étrangère* in the preface to which, written in 1879, he states:

> The thesis, the one which M. Naquet has been sustaining with so much talent and perseverance in the House, and which he is trying to explain to the public in his lectures which are to official debates what these prefaces are to my plays, the thesis was that of divorce, which good sense and justice will finally obtain in the name of the most sacred and natural rights of human liberty and conscience. The spirit of good faith becomes astonished when it looks this question straight in the face, and it undergoes a feeling of revolt when it sees the opposition which is made—in good faith also, but without any plausible argument—by the most respectable people in the world, to the reform that we are demanding. It is true that, on our side, there are also some very respectable people who, like myself, for example, have no desire to make use of divorce for themselves, and who maintain with absolutely irrefutable arguments that this absurd, unjust, dangerous, and savage law of indissoluble marriage should be reformed.[44]

Shortly after writing the above lines, Dumas bestowed considerable time and effort in behalf of the agitation for the repeal of the existing divorce law. In 1880, he published, through the firm of Lévy, his pamphlet *La Question du divorce*, the appearance of which caused great controversy and many written rebuttals. Among the latter may be mentioned *Le Divorce; réponse à Alexandre Dumas fils et à ceux qui préconisent cette doctrine antireligieuse et antisociale*, written by the Abbé Hornstein and published by Vivès in 1880. This is hardly the place to discuss in detail the many arguments offered for and against the new divorce law; for we are concerned, in social questions, with the extent to which Dumas *fils* developed them in his plays and prefaces, and not in his other writings. Suffice it to note once again that four years later, in 1884, the Naquet divorce bill was successfully passed, that Dumas *fils* lived to see completed one of the several reforms of which he had been the ardent advocate, and that at least one modern history of French literature gives him credit for his share in this important social reform.[45]

[44] *Préface, Étrangère*, VI, pp. 205-206.

[45] Nitze & Dargan, *A History of French Literature from the earliest times to the Great War*, p. 598: "The Naquet divorce bill (1884) was passed largely through Dumas' influence."

Before passing on to a discussion of other social questions which find treatment in the plays of Dumas *fils*, let us recapitulate, in a word, his ideas upon divorce. He found the contemporary law, which refused to recognize divorce, to be hopelessly inadequate and unjust. He declared that it even controverted the laws of the gospel which admitted divorce in the case of adultery. The existing law, admitting separation only, made woman suffer, for society attached scandal to the name of the separated woman but soon forgot the wrong-doing of the husband. To show how serious the question was, and to make his contemporaries realize what consequences it might entail, he even went to the extent of depicting on the stage a victim of the divorce law who, knowing that the Code offered him no escape, took the law into his own hands and thus gained his liberty. Complete reform of the divorce law was the only means that Dumas could ever conceive for putting to an end the miseries caused by such faulty legislation.

CHAPTER XIII

THE IDEAS OF DUMAS CONCERNING SOCIAL PROBLEMS (*Continued*)

Illicit Love. Prostitution. Adultery.

NEITHER in his prefaces nor in his plays does Dumas *fils* draw any line of demarcation between illicit love and prostitution—in which latter case a payment of money or its equivalent is made—but he vigorously prosecutes both of these evils. How prevalent he believes illicit love to be he indicates by his statement, "What is that fault? The one that is the most frequent in a young man's life: illicit love."[1] If we were to record the most conspicuous instances of this vice, chosen from the plays of Dumas, our list would include Sternay and Clara Vignot in *Le Fils naturel*, the Count and Albertine in *Un Père prodigue*, Fernand and Denise in *Denise*, André and Mme de Thauzette in *Denise*, Lucien and Rosalie Michon in *Francillon*, Olivier and Suzanne in the *Demi-Monde*, Armand and Marguerite in *La Dame aux camélias*, Paul and Aurore in *Diane de Lys*, Octave and Raymonde in *Monsieur Alphonse*, Héloïse in *Héloïse Paranquet*, and Paul Dornan and Valentine in *Le Filleul de Pompignac*. This list is alarmingly large in view of the fact that we exclude from it all cases of adultery, all of these characters being unmarried at the time of their misdeeds.

Concerning the avowal of previous illicit love by a young woman at the time of her marriage, Dumas has a point of view which is interesting, whether or not we feel inclined to agree with him. "Evidently," he states, "either the young woman must confess everything to the man whose name she is going to bear, or else she must refuse his hand without giving the reasons for her refusal, for her secret is her own; she has paid for it too dearly for anything to force her to reveal it to anyone who might betray it."[2] This theory is well developed in the play *Denise*. In this drama, André wishes to marry Denise, but desires to assure himself that

[1] *Préface, Héloïse Paranquet, Théâtre des Autres*, I, p. 117.

[2] *Notes sur Denise*, VII, p. 247.

her reputation is beyond reproach. Thouvenin tells him to ask the parents of Denise for her hand. If Denise is guilty and does not love André she will, says Thouvenin, say that she does not wish to marry; and then André will be compelled to be satisfied with that reason. If, on the other hand, she loves André and is guilty, she will tell him the truth. Thouvenin's prediction comes true, for Denise confesses her past fault to André. In another play, *Monsieur Alphonse*, Raymonde, who has married without confessing her fault to her husband, bitterly regrets not having done so. "That is what I should have done before my marriage," she laments. "I never dared to. Blush before him, never! I would die of shame. I prefer to die of chagrin. Oh! how I am suffering."[3]

Dumas believes, however, that this confession should come only from the woman herself, and that the husband should not be informed of his bride's misconduct by the man who has been her lover. "Evidently," he tells us, "but less evidently, however, a man who has been the lover of a woman, of a woman who has given herself and not sold herself, must save *afterwards*, even through falsehood, the honor of that woman whom he did not know how to respect *previously*. If he is questioned by anyone who believes that he has the right to do so . . . he must swear that the woman is innocent."[4] In *Denise*, when André questions Fernand concerning Denise, the latter hesitates for a moment, but refuses to implicate her; and Thouvenin, Dumas' *raisonneur*, approves such an action by declaring: "One does not divulge the secret that one has had with a woman, and particularly with a young girl."[5] In the *Demi-Monde*, Olivier is confronted with a similar situation. In this instance, however, the woman in the case is unscrupulous, and Olivier sees that Raymond is on the point of wrecking his entire life by marrying Suzanne who, of course, will never acknowledge her past. "Now that you tell me that you are going to give her your name," he tells Raymond, "it is another story; and my silence would be a treason for which you might rightly take me to account some day. I shall hide nothing more from you. Things did, I believe, follow their normal course. You don't bear a grudge against me?"[6] But Olivier had reason

[3] *Monsieur Alphonse*, Act I, sc. 1, 78.
[4] *Notes sur Denise*, VII, pp. 247-248.
[5] *Denise*, Act IV, sc. 3, 232.
[6] *Demi-Monde*, Act III, sc. 5, 124.

to regret this action. Although Raymond thanked him profusely for warning him, his gratitude soon turned to rancor. Olivier soon learned that he had played into Suzanne's own hand, and she was able to say to him, "What, at your age, you do not know that the surest way of causing a break with your best friend is to speak ill of the woman whom he loves, even if you can give him proof, even if you do give him proof?"[7]

On the other hand, according to Dumas, a man cares little whether or not his sins are disclosed; for, even after marriage, he makes no attempt to conceal his previous faults. As Francine declares, "Nowadays husbands, instead of hiding as much as possible the adventures of their bachelor days from their legitimate wives, relate them in all of their details and even boast of them with anecdotes and photographs to bear them out. What I know of these things, I who ought not to know about them, is frightful."[8] When this same Francine, in order to bring her husband to terms, has pretended to have been unfaithful to him, and when a separation seems to be inevitable, Thérèse warns her to do her utmost to keep her husband. "He will not be dishonored for having had a mistress," she tells Francine, "but you will be forever dishonored for having let people believe that you have had a lover."[9]

Thus, in a word, the picture which Dumas gives us of illicit love portrays a vice of alarming frequency, ruinous to the reputation of woman, but excused by society in the case of man. It is just one additional argument in favor of the abolishment of the old French divorce law which tacitly sanctioned a dual standard of morality.

Although the subject of prostitution finds full treatment in the prefaces of the plays of Dumas *fils*, *La Dame aux camélias* is the only drama in which it is portrayed to any extent. The explanation of this may perhaps be found in the fact that Dumas believed the theatrical public to be sympathetic, rather than hostile, to the courtesan; for, as he states, "A courtesan, that is to say a woman who has had so many lovers that she never knew the names of some of them and has forgotten the names of others, a courtesan

[7] *Ibid.*, sc. 11, 145.
[8] *Francillon*, Act I, sc. 3, 286.
[9] *Ibid.*, Act III, sc. 3, 381.

will always be able to find pity and sympathy before the public, because she will always be able to attribute her faults to misery, to ignorance, to bad examples, or to the venality of those people who composed her family."[10] The success of *La Dame aux camélias*, with its regeneration of Marguerite Gautier through true love, would seem to corroborate Dumas' judgment of his public. Even de Ryons, a man whose heart is not easily touched, cannot refrain from sympathizing with this type of woman, particularly when her youth and beauty have faded. "She came to ask me for a few *louis*," he relates. "Isn't it sad when, at the age of thirty, you see the return of one of these women who seem to come back from the remote past. You knew her when she was beautiful, elegant, smiling; and now she is wrinkled and sallow, and most miserably clad. She speaks to you of the pawn-broker, of misery, of sickness; and with her old confidential smile she asks you for enough money with which to buy food for two or three days. . . . Oh! wretched youth!"[11]

After the success of *La Dame aux camélias*, having attained a name for himself among contemporary dramatists, Dumas found himself confronted with three possibilities. First, he might continue to write other plays of the same type, treating realistically a romantic subject in the general truth of which he had no faith; for, as we noted in chapter ten, he believed Marguerite Gautier to be an exception. Secondly, he might attempt to force his opposite opinions concerning prostitution upon a public which would be highly unsympathetic toward his point of view. The third course open to Dumas *fils* was to maintain silence on the subject in his plays, except to refer to it incidentally throughout the action of the drama, reserving more ample discussion of the problem to his prefaces; and it was this course which he adopted. There may be some who criticize this decision of the dramatist; but those who are more generous will be grateful that he did not adopt the first policy, that of pleasing his audience with a subject in which he himself had no faith, thereby debasing his art.

We find a very concrete summary of the question of prostitution in the preface entitled *A propos de la dame aux camélias*, wherein

[10] *Préface, Étrangère*, VI, p. 188.

[11] *Ami des femmes*, Act II, sc. 1, 96.

Dumas outlines, in forty closely printed pages, the history and progress of prostitution and adultery in France. He tells us that just as society excludes a poverty-stricken, ignorant girl who resorts to prostitution for a livelihood, this same society would not invite her to its dinner-table or permit her to marry one of its young men even if she remained honest. If, on the other hand, she married a humble workman who, through some genius he might possess, accumulated a fortune, if she had a daughter who now had prospects of a million francs as an inheritance, then society would gladly permit the daughter to marry one of its sons. Money, thus, is the basis of society's judgment of such questions. The humble workman who accumulates a fortune is, however, a most exceptional individual; and the poor working-girl has little incentive to remain honest under current conditions. To the poverty-stricken young man, society offers military service; but the penniless young woman is practically forced into prostitution if she does not wish to face starvation.

The laws governing military service, the refuge of the destitute young man, are, according to Dumas, highly illogical. "Just cast a glance," he says, "at the logic of society when it says to man, 'Between the ages of eighteen and twenty-eight, not only shall you not bring any children into the world, but you shall withdraw from among those who are healthy the greatest possible number.' This arrangement would, in a given time, if war were to continue in the world, lead necessarily to the destruction of the family and of the human race."[12] But the laws governing prostitution, the refuge of the penniless young girl, are abominable; for they sanction the evil, placing it under police supervision. Why not, suggests Dumas, establish conscription for women as well as for men? Why not furnish a means of existence for women, if you have a means of existence, however absurd it may be, for men. And so Dumas *fils* proceeds to outline a plan which, he claims, will do much to eliminate prostitution from France:

> Every girl of fifteen years will be compelled to establish her identity, just as a man is forced to establish his identity at the age of twenty-one. In the presence of members of her own family or before two reliable

[12] *A propos de la dame aux camélias*, I, p. 45.

witnesses she will prove that she has a source of income either through money of her own or through a profession. The girl who has no income will, if she knows a trade, work at this trade in workshops organized by the State. Such workshops will never cost so much as the army because they will bring in a certain revenue. If the girl does not know a trade, she will enter as an apprentice instead of as a worker. If she is rich and does not wish to work, she will pay for a substitute who will work in her place. If she has no resources and does not wish to work, she will be under police supervision and, at the first serious offense, will be exiled to the colonies where deportees need wives and the land needs people to cultivate it. Since they have not wished to be women, they will be females.[13]

It is reasonable to suppose that Dumas, who gave so much constructive thought to the question of prostitution, saw that the subject offered dramatic possibilities and that he perhaps yearned, at times, to formulate them into a play. It is interesting to compare the passage which we have just quoted with the passage on civil conscription elaborated by de Cayolle which we cited in chapter eleven. If Dumas had written a thesis-play on the subject of prostitution, it is not in the least unlikely that some *raisonneur* would have delivered the foregoing quotation in the form of a monologue, just as de Cayolle expressed his views on the money question in *La Question d'argent.*

Dumas clearly indicates that prostitution is not confined to the lower classes. "People reproached me," he says, "for reverting so often to the same subject. They asked me in what level of society I had seen these things. I was forced to answer the truth, in all levels of society; and that is why I pointed out the danger."[14] That he believed the evil to be particularly rampant among the upper classes is evident from the speech of Henri, in *Francillon,* who says, "Lucien de Riverolles, Stanislas de Grandredon, Jean de Carillac . . . and I, Henri de Symeux, all of us more or less childhood companions, made the resolution never to marry and to limit ourselves to those costly but facile *amours* which are the particular characteristic of the upper classes in the second half of the century which gave us birth."[15]

Upon man himself Dumas places the onus of these conditions.

[13] *A propos de la dame aux camélias,* I, pp. 47-48.

[14] *A M. Cuvillier-Fleury,* V, p. 200.

[15] *Francillon,* Act I, sc. 4, 289.

"Why does man so readily dishonor a woman?" he asks. "Because nothing protects the woman. . . . What is the unanswerable reason that even the most degraded woman can give for her degradation? A first man. It is therefore against this first man that woman must be protected."[16] Unless man, who has been the cause of the present situation, hastens to formulate new laws, prostitution will completely devour France. "We are on the way to universal prostitution," he asserts. "Do not exclaim. I know what I am talking about."[17] "My suggestions are impracticable? Then find others; all I care for is results. But hurry up, because the house is on fire."[18]

Before passing on to the third division of the present chapter, let us briefly restate the opinions of Dumas concerning prostitution. We have observed that he vigorously denounced the evil, even though he had written one play, and a most successful one, dealing with the regeneration of the courtesan. He probably saw great dramatic possibilities in the subject; but, for fear of alienating his audience, he refrained from presenting it upon the stage in the form in which he would have liked to treat it. He believed poverty to be one of the basic causes of prostitution, and pointed out that whereas the law provided a refuge for destitute young men, it actually encouraged prostitution as a means of livelihood for young women by placing their profession under police supervision. In calling for new laws to govern this social problem, Dumas is a reformer in the full sense of the word; for not only does he point out the defects in the existing laws, but he offers constructive criticism for their amelioration by suggesting a plan of his own which he believes will remedy the situation.

From the standpoint of morality, Dumas believed adultery to be even more vicious than prostitution. "I do not see any difference," he maintains, "between the woman who, outside of marriage, gives herself to a man in order to amuse her body, and the woman who gives herself in order to nourish and clothe her body, except that the latter considers only herself and deceives nobody, while the former perjures a pledge, deceives her husband, compromises her children,

[16] *A propos de la dame aux camélias*, I, p. 47.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 50.

and plays with infanticide. Her only advantage is that she costs nothing."[19] It is precisely in this light that Dumont visualizes the situation when, in *Le Supplice d'une femme*, he expresses the following severe indictment of his wife Mathilde: "Thus, for eight years you have lied to me every day, every hour, every minute, and I saw nothing. And you affected tenderness with me! And I did not stifle you in the midst of these embraces which I thought were an expression of love and which were merely an expression of foresight on your part. Wretch! And I saw you blush when chance brought you into contact on the street or at the theater with some fallen woman! And I thought that it was on account of her that your modesty made you redden! It was on account of yourself, wasn't it? Hunger and misery are excuses; what excuses have you?"[20]

We have already stated that Dumas was of the opinion that prostitution was so prevalent in France that it threatened to become universal. That he was also greatly concerned over the prevalence of adultery is evident. Francine clearly indicates the frequency of the vice when she says, "A man of good society weds a young girl of just as good nobility as himself, in the presence of a congregation which the newspapers report to be as numerous as it is select, to the sound of beautiful music, with the benediction of a bishop who has been especially selected to perform the ceremony. Several months later the husband returns to his escapades; the woman receives a lover known by everybody, hiding the fact as best she can. That is what we see every day."[21] If we feel inclined to believe that Francine is guilty of an exaggerated statement which does not express the views of Dumas *fils*, we find additional evidence when we make a list of the adulterers and adulteresses in his various plays. This list includes Valentine de Santis in *Le Demi-Monde*, André and Mme de Prailles in *Un Père prodigue*, de Septmonts in *L'Étrangère*, de Cygneroi and Lydie de Morancé in *Une Visite de noces*, the prince de Birac and Sylvanie in *La Princesse Georges*, Césarine in *La Femme de Claude*, de Simerose in *L'Ami des femmes*, Mme Barantin in

[19] *A propos de la dame aux camélias*, I, p. 40.

[20] *Supplice d'une femme*, Act II, sc. 5, 85.

[21] *Francillon*, Act II, sc. 4, 327-328.

Les Idées de madame Aubray, Mathilde in *Le Supplice d'une femme*, the général de Fronteville in *Le Filleul de Pompignac*, and the Countess in *La Comtesse Romani*.

In *A propos de la dame aux camélias*, Dumas explains that adultery has been an outgrowth of the development of prostitution in France. He tells us that many daughters of officers killed in the wars of the Empire, girls of good families who were suddenly thrown upon their own resources, became the *femmes entretenues* of men of wealth. The shop-girls of Paris joined this group. Then came the development of railroads. Increased wealth came to the man of the provinces who now had better means of transporting his goods. Many of these provincials came to Paris and squandered their quickly amassed fortunes upon these women. Then women of noble birth, deserted by their husbands, attempted to imitate in every way these women who were their competitors. Thus, Dumas claims at the time that he writes, they have the same clothes, the same manners, and the same language; and adultery has become almost as universal as prostitution.

Inasmuch as Dumas accepts the study of woman as all-important in the drama, he gives great attention to the question of adultery; for, as he states, "celibacy, marriage, and adultery, that is the tragic trilogy in which the life of woman moves, and that is the ground in which we dramatic poets can always dig."[22] In our discussion of the ideas of Dumas concerning the manners of his day, we have already touched upon the question of adultery, showing that in the early stages of his career he depicted it with a total lack of sympathy which developed, in his symbolistic stage, to flagellant denunciation. In this latter stage of his career, the dramatist permitted Claude to take the law into his own hands and kill his wife, a dénouement which represents the sole instance of direct, violent, and conscious antagonism of his public by Dumas. Naught but adverse criticism resulted from this adventure; for, as Dumas writes, "In composing *La Femme de Claude*, I did not wish to construct what is known as a *pièce de théâtre;* I wanted to try to say something private, intimate, and profound. The public refused to listen to me. That was its right; let us say no more about it."[23]

[22] *Préface, Visite de noces*, V, p. 15.

[23] *Théâtre complet*, vol. VIII, *Notes inédites*, p. 358.

It is worthy of note that Dumas mitigated the action of Claude by making his wife not only an adulteress but also a traitress. The play, as we remember, appeared in 1873, soon after the German crucifixion of France; and it is fairly evident that the dramatist wished to solicit the sympathy of the public through its patriotism in order to overrule its antagonism toward his main idea.

Yet Dumas found the public little inclined to denounce the adulteress. "Love, even in adultery, is the excuse and the absolution of woman in the eyes of the public," he writes.[24] That he had no intention of pandering to what he considered a false viewpoint of his public is certain. In his *Notes inédites*, he tells us that even while writing *Diane de Lys*, his second play, he had decided to take a firm stand against the traditional happy and comic treatment of adultery on the stage. "Kill a man by a pistol-shot on a stage where adultery had always had a happy and even a comic dénouement! What would the habitués of the *Gymnase* say? Tradition said to me, 'Patch things up.' The situation and logic said to me, 'Kill him!' I decided in favor of logic."[25] However willing his public may have been to excuse the adulteress by claiming that love dominated her acts, Dumas could never agree with it. Thus, his *raisonneur* de Cygneroi, in *Une Visite de noces*, fails to find any element of love in adultery. He declares:

> That is entirely untrue. There is no love, there is no remorse in those affairs. Certainly no one has cultivated more than I have myself that contraband love which moralists have branded with the ugly name of adultery, and, since I am not an imbecile, whatever you may say, I have taken the trouble to submit this particular kind of love to a physiologico-philosophico-chemical analysis. This is the result. Adultery is one of those mixtures in which the elements become associated sometimes, but never combine. . . . Put together, pulverize, distil, decompose, precipitate all these elements, and I challenge you to find in them an atom of esteem, a milligram of love, or the slightest vapor of dignity. False! false! false![26]

And yet the public was unwilling to treat adultery seriously. "At what do we laugh the most at the theater?" questions Dumas.

[24] *Préface, Étrangère*, VI, p. 190.
[25] *Théâtre complet*, vol. VIII, *Notes inédites*, p. 46.
[26] *Visite de noces*, sc. 3, 32-33.

"At the deceived husband. From what do we suffer the most in private life? From being that husband."[27] Against this attitude, Dumas voices a vigorous protest: "Let us declare publicly that adultery is not laughable but that it is a crime to which the most severe punishments should be applied instead of being content with separating the married couple or with imprisoning the wife for a few months, as does the law."[28] With this statement in mind, Dumas invariably treats adultery in his plays as a most serious question. In *Le Filleul de Pompignac*, the général de Fronteville had attached little importance to his adulterous act; but there comes a time in his life when the seriousness of his misconduct brings him face to face with tragedy. It is at this moment that he admits, "That is the result of a fault. You laugh at it when you are only twenty years of age. You call it a bit of good fortune, a youthful adventure. It is death, it is dishonor, it is parricide. . . . Do you wish to know what I think of myself? I am a scoundrel. I caused the death of a woman and now I must kill the husband, the man whose honor I stole!"[29]

Lack of emotion characterizes the treatment of adultery in the plays of Dumas. This attitude of the dramatist is clearly outlined in the preface to *Une Visite de noces* in which the author deems himself called upon to cauterize the wound of adultery without permitting his sympathy for the patient to interfere with the effecting of the cure:

> I know a young mother who adored her little child who, in turn, adored a little dog. However beloved this little dog may have been, he went mad one day and bit the child in the cheek. Do you know what the mother did? She heated a fire-shovel and applied the red-hot iron to the wound. The child fought and cried, but the mother heard nothing and the child was saved. He has a scar, it is true, but he is alive. Would you have preferred the mother to weep? There are cases when we have to put the shovels into the fire immediately, and adultery is one of these instances.[30]

How gullible Dumas believes women are to become adulteresses

[27] *A propos de la dame aux camélias*, I, p. 38.
[28] *Ibid.*
[29] *Filleul de Pompignac*, Act IV, sc. 6, 109.
[30] *Préface, Visite de noces*, V, pp. 17-18.

through the machinations of men! It is strange how they can consider themselves or their lovers on a higher plane than animals. "You know," says Valentine in *La Princesse Georges*, "that the wild boar is monogamous; that is to say, he adheres to a single female companion, an action which makes him either superior or inferior to man, according to your viewpoint. If anyone takes his mate from him, he becomes furious."[31] How easily even good women are led into adultery, hoping to find the true love which they are seeking! Dumas warns them, "The day when you give yourself you are inferior to the courtesan. You commit an action just as shameful as hers, but more stupid, for she gains something, be it only a piece of bread; you lose everything, the esteem of others, your own self-esteem, and that of your lover. It is a dupe's profession."[32] Truly it is a dupe's profession, a *métier de dupes*. Francine is sensible enough to see that if she has ceased to inspire love in her husband, she is even less likely to inspire it in the man who would make of her an adulteress. In this connection, she declares, ". . . if, having married freely, as we have done, a man who pleased us more than others, we come to the point of no longer inspiring him with love for us, of no longer feeling any love for him, it is madness or shamelessness to risk a new attempt with a man who comes to offer secretly, without respect, without love, I do not know what shameful pastime, what degrading compensation of a cab and a furnished hotel."[33] Too late do these women discover that there can be no love in adultery; too late do they realize that destruction has been sown. Deeply does Mathilde regret her situation when she exclaims, "You speak to me of tortures! Are there any that are comparable to mine? What kind of an existence have you made for me? How many times have I thought of dying in order to escape from it forever! For the past seven years, not a day has passed without a scene such as this one. You dishonor me in my husband, in my child, in my remembrances, in my sleep. His by duty, yours by fear, nothing of myself belongs to me any more; and love, the love of a wife, the love of a mistress, the love of a mother, is nothing but sacrilege, deceit, and ignominy. And you expect me to love you!"[34]

[31] *Princesse Georges*, Act II, sc. 1, 121.

[32] *A propos de la dame aux camélias*, I, p. 42.

[33] *Francillon*, Act I, sc. 2, 267-268.

[34] *Supplice d'une femme*, Act I, sc. 11, 68.

Mathilde suffers from an act which she herself has committed. In *Le Filleul de Pompignac,* however, we see the suffering that adultery brings upon an entirely innocent man. In a dramatic scene in this play, Dornan, crabbed and misanthropic, tells the général de Fronteville that he was formerly a cheerful and honest man. It was his dying wife's confession of her adultery that completely wrecked his life. He little realizes, as he speaks, that the man to whom he is talking is the one who has brought dishonor upon him:

> She told me everything except the name of her accomplice, and I could never make her tell me that. My child was no longer my child. She died from her misdeed. On her death-bed she confessed everything to me in order to ease her conscience and in order to reconcile herself with God before whom she was about to appear. She demanded that I rear the child as if he were my own son. Why did she say that? Who asked her to do so? Why did she not deceive me to the end? Ah, those who repent are pitiless! The fact remains that in one minute she destroyed my past happiness, my present happiness, my future happiness. In order to save her soul she ruined mine, for I have become wicked, unjust, and hateful.[35]

In contrast with the woman who stupidly imagines that she will find in adultery the true love which her husband has failed to give her, or cannot give her, we have the less scrupulous woman who is shamelessly faithless. In this case, Dumas claims that the laws are at fault, that even religion and society must share the blame; for the adulteress knows that she is fully protected by them: "She knows that the manners of society excuse her, that the laws protect her, that religion shields her, that the atmosphere of society, in spite of calumniations and the facts themselves, envelopes and preserves her; she knows, finally, that she has a safeguard even in the silent scorn of that husband who is condemned to live with her and who resigns himself to it."[36] If Valentine could have her way, the society of which she is a member would exclude from its midst Sylvanie, the adulteress; and it is quite evident that she expresses the views of Dumas on the subject when she says, "Well, as for me, I acknowledge that I blush not only for my sex but also for our social sphere when I see that we welcome such a brazen

[35] *Filleul de Pompignac,* Act III, sc. 10, 92-93.

[36] *A M. Cuvillier-Fleury,* V, p. 207.

woman as one of our own, under pretext that she is the daughter of such-and-such a person and receives her title from such-and-such a one."[37]

A rapid summary of these views of Dumas on the subject of adultery shows us that he considered the evil to be on no higher moral plane than prostitution. He found the public either ready to pardon the adulteress or else to treat the question as a huge joke. Against this attitude he protested, scourging unrelentingly and unemotionally a vice which he believed to be altogether too prevalent. Women who seek in adultery a love hitherto denied them he denounced as mere fools; for he refused to believe that there can be any true love in adultery. He bewailed the existence of the other type of adulteress who is utterly without moral sense, and bemoaned the fact that such women were protected in their shame by the laws, by religion, and by society.

[37] *Princesse Georges*, Act II, sc. 1, 120.

CHAPTER XIV

THE IDEAS OF DUMAS CONCERNING SOCIAL PROBLEMS (*Concluded*)

Illegitimacy

DUMAS begins the preface to *Le Fils naturel* with the statement, "Here is a comedy for which I confess my predilection. . . . I shall come back to the subject again, both in the theater and in books. It is an obsession." The dramatist kept his word. He had already published two years previously, in 1866, a novel, *L'Affaire Clémenceau*, which is largely autobiographical, and which relates the sufferings which the illegitimate child is forced to endure. It also contains many passages in which the author moralizes and presents his views upon the question. His volume entitled *La recherche de la paternité, lettre à M. Rivet, député*, published in 1883, places him among the leaders of the movement to gain additional rights for the illegitimate child. To these works must be added the two prefaces and the six plays which we mentioned in chapter four, all of which present vital phases of this question to which Dumas gave so much thought. The summaries which we have already made of the above-mentioned plays give us a fairly adequate conception of the views of Dumas on the subject; and it remains for us, in order to complete the picture, to outline as briefly as possible some of the additional ideas which the dramatist presents in other places, particularly in the preface to *Monsieur Alphonse*.

Before doing this, however, it will be well to consider exactly what prejudices Dumas had to combat. According to French law, children born out of wedlock are divided into two classes: the *enfant naturel* or child of parents neither of whom is married, and the *enfant adultérin* or child of parents either or both of whom are married. The general public, ignorant of precise legal terminology, has frequently used the term *enfant naturel* to refer to both cases; but the distinction must be kept in mind, for the law has always offered far less concessions to the *enfant adultérin* than to the *enfant naturel*. In dealing with illegitimate children, the

Code civil of 1804, Article 340, stipulated unequivocally that "la recherche de la paternité est interdite." Thus a mother could not compel the man who had seduced her to aid her in bringing up their child, nor could the child later force his father to give him his name and grant him equal rights of inheritance. This child, deprived of the rights and privileges granted to legitimate children, was nevertheless responsible for military service and other demands of society on a par with legitimate children. To some extent, actual legal decisions modified the literal interpretation of Article 340, clearly indicating that public opinion was by no means in complete accord with the strict law which Napoleon had imposed. Nevertheless, only meager concessions were granted; and, at the time that Dumas was writing, the situation of the illegitimate child was deplorable.

In the preface to *Monsieur Alphonse*, written in 1879, Dumas analyzes in detail the rights, according to law, of four kinds of illegitimate children: the *enfant naturel non reconnu*, the *enfant naturel reconnu*, the *enfant adultérin*, and the illegitimate girl.

The recognized male, however unfortunate he may be, has the most rights according to law. "If you are a recognized natural son," Dumas writes, "you will have the right to demand lodging of your parents in addition to sustenance, but if they have taught you a manual trade they will be under no obligations to you. At their death, when their father, their mother, their brothers, their sisters, their nephews, and their nieces have shared among themselves the inheritance, they will give you something, according to the number of predecessors, or of collateral heirs, or of legitimate descendants who may have been born after you."[1] Dumas *fils* was seven years of age when his father recognized him legally, and thus he belongs to this group. He does not, however, treat this type of illegitimate child in his plays, probably because he wishes to choose those who, having fewer rights, exemplify more deplorable circumstances.

"If you are an *enfant adultérin*," continues Dumas, "not only will you be unable to have any claim on your father, but it will also be forbidden you to have any claim on your mother. You

[1] *Préface, Monsieur Alphonse*, VI, p.13.

will never be able to be recognized; you will have neither name nor civil status; but you will none the less be submitted to all of the duties of a citizen and all the responsibilities of the soldier."[2] Paul Dornan, in *Le Filleul de Pompignac*, is an *enfant adultérin*, and the reader will doubtless remember the dissipated youth that he led. In this play, however, Dumas centered dramatic interest more upon the complications evolving from the adulterous act of Mme Dornan than upon the plight of Paul himself.

What is the future of the illegitimate girl? "If you are of the female sex instead of being of the male sex, it is still simpler: suicide or prostitution; the river or the sidewalk."[3] Dumas does not, however, portray in his plays the horrible future reserved for girls of this class. On the contrary, he saves two illegitimate girls from the dismal conditions which may await them. In *Le Supplice d'une femme*, Dumont has reared Jeanne in the belief that she is his own daughter; and she has thus been brought up in enjoyment of comfort. Camille, the daughter of Héloïse Paranquet, when still a baby, charms her grandfather who treats her with all the love and tenderness which he would have bestowed upon a legitimate grandchild.

We have reserved until last the question of the unrecognized male, who has few rights, even though he can prove his parentage. "If you are an unrecognized natural son," Dumas states, "you will have no moral or social claim that you may exercise upon your father, whatever proofs you may have of his paternity. If you can prove that you are his son, you will have right to sustenance just as the horse that pulls the cart or the dog that guards the house."[4] It is this second type that Dumas has chosen for frequent discussion. He believes that unless the father has recognized the child at birth, there is little hope that he will do so at a later date. Clara Vignot voices this opinion when she says, "I never said anything about it to anyone, but I was convinced that M. Sternay would never marry the working-girl Clara and that he would never recognize his son; for when a father's heart does not have that idea on the very day that the child is born, it does not come

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 14.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

to him later on."[5] That Clara is correct in her deduction is apparent later on in the play when Sternay considers that he has acted magnanimously in offering to pay for the maintenance of the child; for, as explained above, inasmuch as no one could prove his paternity, he was doing more than the law required:

STERNAY: You would not have married a working-girl whose mother was a country shopkeeper, whose father was a street-laborer, and whose aunt was a scrub-woman. Come now, my uncle, one does not contract such a marriage.

THE MARQUIS: Agreed; but one recognizes the child.

STERNAY: Not at all. One does not embarrass one's entire life for a youthful error. One assures the child enough with which to live, as I did (it is not my fault if the mother refused to accept it); and in doing so one acts as only two men in a hundred do.[6]

Granted that some of these illegitimate children, whether they be boys or girls, are amply provided for in their childhood, the day arrives, according to Dumas, when they wish to marry and enjoy the comforts of family life. It is at this moment that the parents of the legitimate child, bound by the prejudices of society, refuse to permit their son or daughter to marry the child without a name. Sternay informs Jacques that even if his family sanctioned the marriage of Jacques and Hermine, society, knowing Jacques to be an illegitimate child, would believe that some stigma was attached to the name of Hermine, for society would be unable to find any other interpretation for such consent on the part of the parents. "It will be impossible to hide the irregularity of your birth," he tells Jacques. "People will imagine outrageous things about Hermine, for it is always the woman whom they accuse. They will say that there must be some very serious reason for my mother and myself to consent to this marriage, admitting, of course, that she does consent. They will perhaps give it the name of reparation."[7] It is this situation that makes Jacques exclaim bitterly, "Thus my whole life is broken, my future is ruined, and my heart is condemned for a fault which is not mine, a fault which is yours and the consequences of which you cast back upon me with the cold logic of social egotism."[8] Nowhere else has Dumas given us a

[5] *Fils naturel*, Act II, sc. 5, 119.
[6] *Ibid.*, Act III, sc. 2, 139.
[7] *Ibid.*, Act II, sc. 4, 117.
[8] *Ibid.*

more convincing or more irrefutable argument against the injustice of society toward the illegitimate child than in *Le Fils naturel.*

Himself a *fils naturel,* Dumas had suffered sufficiently to realize the inadequacy of the laws governing illegitimacy and earnestly to wish for their reform. In maintaining theses concerning the money question and concerning divorce, he was pleading in behalf of others; for the attitude of society toward money and the laws governing divorce did not affect him directly. In this case, however, he was speaking from experiences which he had not merely observed, but had himself undergone. We can not, therefore, accuse him of being a theoretician or a dreamer when he makes Mme Guichard's anger rise to a high pitch as she declares to Octave: "That child is your daughter and, leaving her in the hands of mercenary people, you went to see her once in two years. You seduced this woman, made her a mother, and then abandoned her. You forced this man, your own friend, to recognize the child in order to save his wife's honor. And you signed as witness to the act of recognition, you, the child's father. You scoundrel! . . . And where are the laws to prevent such infamies? Legislators forgot to make them."[9]

Dumas shows us that the natural child is entirely dependent upon the whim of his father in obtaining a name for himself. When Jacques, in *Le Fils naturel,* tells his mother that he will go to his father and demand an explanation of why Sternay has never recognized him, Clara warns him that it is within Sternay's power to deny that he is the father, inasmuch as there is no proof of the fact. As we know, Sternay steadfastly refused to recognize Jacques until it was distinctly to his own advantage to do so; and Tellier, in *Les Idées de madame Aubray,* constantly kept secret the fact that he was the father of Gaston. Here, once again, the laws are to blame; for, as Guy de Sableuse tells Roland, in *Héloïse Paranquet,* "You do not know the law, my dear Roland. With good intentions, no doubt, it encourages the father not to give his name to the child born of his secret affections."[10] These laws, which permit the father to conceal his identity, are, furthermore, an encouragement to illicit love. "How many men there are," asserts

[9] *Monsieur Alphonse,* Act III, sc. 7, 166.

[10] *Héloïse Paranquet,* Act I, sc. 2, 203.

Dumas, "who, their need satisfied and their pleasure satiated, turn their backs upon their momentary companion, without giving heed to the consequences of the act which they have committed, and immediately start in quest of another woman. . . ."[11] Fernand, who has seduced Denise, is typical of this kind of man. He thinks of little else but women, declares children to be the inconveniences of marriage and the accidents of what he calls *galanterie*, and takes as his model Don Juan.

As in the case of all the problems of social existence that he discusses, so in cases of illegitimacy, Dumas places the blame squarely on the shoulders of man. "Who is the most guilty of the three; the father, the mother, or the child?" he queries. "It is indisputably the father, since he runs no physical or moral risk, since he has no other purpose than that of satisfying his curiosity, his desire, and his senses."[12] Guilty is, indeed, too mild an expression: he is a criminal of the lowest order. "I maintain," declares Dumas, "that the man who voluntarily brings a child into the world (and it is always voluntarily), without assuring him the material, moral, and social means of living, without recognizing himself responsible for all the subsequent misery that may be caused, is a criminal to be classed with robbers and murderers."[13] Thus, the marquis, a man of mild disposition who moderates in his speech the severity of the opinions which he entertains, frankly tells Sternay, "I believe that you have committed something like an infamous act, my good fellow."[14] Had Dumas written *Le Fils naturel* during his symbolistic period, he probably would have made Sternay a thorough criminal in the eyes of the audience. As it is, Sternay is distinctly displeasing. He is turned into complete ridicule in the ninth scene of the third act, the scene in which the marquis threatens to recognize Jacques as his own child; again in the tenth scene of the same act, when Aristide explains the laws on illegitimacy to the marquis and to Sternay; and particularly in the third scene of the fourth act, the scene in which Aristide explains that now Sternay wishes to recognize his son because it is to his advantage to do so.

Le Fils naturel is not the only play in which fathers of illegitimate children are depicted as malevolent. In *Les Idées de madame*

[11] *Préface, Monsieur Alphonse*, VI, p. 7.
[12] *Ibid.*, p. 11.
[13] *Préface, Fils naturel*, III, p. 6.
[14] *Fils naturel*, Act III, sc. 2, 140.

Aubray, which appeared nine years after *Le Fils naturel*, Dumas gave a slender rôle to Tellier, but painted him in much darker colors than Sternay. Not content with abandoning Jeannine, a good woman, Tellier attempts to defame her character at the moment when she is about to enjoy the first happy moments in a life which he has ruined. He tells Mme Aubray that Jeannine was formerly a working-girl whose humble parents had a rather lax standard of morality. He tells her that Jeannine has a child, but was never married. He takes care to conceal the fact, however, that he possessed Jeannine against her will. Thus, Tellier hopes that society, having exonerated him, may punish the woman upon whom he has brought misery. According to Dumas, Tellier may well rely upon having these expectations fulfilled; for the lawmaker reasons thus: "The woman being less guilty, I, the legislator, since I have not punished the man and since punishment must nevertheless be given inasmuch as there has been an infraction of moral, social, and religious laws, I am going to punish the woman."[15] Society at large accepts the verdict of the *Code* upon the question of the unmarried mother, as Camille observes in *Les Idées de madame Aubray*. "From time to time," Camille relates, "the woman who feels herself overwhelmed, who sees herself lost, who no longer knows what is to become of her, utters a cry of revolt or appeal from the midst of the waves which are engulfing her. A few generous souls utter an exclamation of indignation or of pity; but the mass continues its way saying, 'There is another one drowning; so much the worse for her.' "[16]

In *Le Fils naturel*, Aristide maintains that if the mother of an illegitimate child is worthy, the father should marry her. "If you had an income of a hundred thousand francs," he asks Clara, "do you think you would have to force his will to make him marry you? Of course you wouldn't. Well, when a man has nothing for which to reproach the mother of his son except that she hasn't a hundred thousand francs income, his duty is to marry her just as if she did have such an income."[17] Clara replies that even if a man is willing, under such conditions, to marry the woman of little

[15] *Préface, Monsieur Alphonse*, VI, p. 12.

[16] *Idées de madame Aubray*, Act III, sc. 1, 297.

[17] *Fils naturel*, prologue, 54.

wealth, this woman cannot gain respect. "When a poor girl," she says, "who has committed a fault with a man of a position superior to hers is married by that man, people do not say, 'She was trusting'; they say, 'She was clever,' "[18] and thus ever afterward she is accused of having been a willing victim in order to force the man to pay her well for his indiscretion.

The unfortunate position in which the unmarried mother finds herself is well shown in *Héloïse Paranquet.* As we look back at the plot of this play, we see in what a position Guy de Sableuse has put both Héloïse and also his illegitimate daughter Camille. He is willing to marry Héloïse; but his father refuses to sanction the marriage. Guy, who adores his father, hopes in time to gain his consent. In the meantime, he would gladly recognize the child; but both the laws and the opinion of society stand in his way. If he recognized Camille, she would receive only one-third of his fortune. Before establishing legal recognition, it would be necessary for Héloïse to grant her consent; but, in doing so, she would be compelled to confess her fault to society, and thus far knowledge of the fault has been confined to the immediate family circle. Later in the play, we learn that Héloïse was unworthy of the esteem in which Guy had held her. Not only did she accept immediately another lover, but she was also a very indifferent mother. She did not, however, hate her child. Yet there occur, according to Dumas *fils*, instances where the birth of an illegitimate child inspires hatred instead of love in the heart of the mother. "Very often," he says, "there occur cases where conception, instead of producing love, will produce hatred for the child, and where the mother, far from feeling joy over the birth, will hope, will resolve, will provoke the death of the being to whom nature has forced her to give life."[19] Not only will these women sometimes fail to feel for the child that maternal sentiment which is declared to be so natural and so indisputable, but, from the day when the child is announced, he will have inspired terror, anger, and hatred."[20] Thus, Césarine gave birth to a child whom she never really loved and was glad when this illegitimate child finally died. "Do you think," she asks, "that you

[18] *Fils naturel,* prologue, 55.

[19] *Préface, Monsieur Alphonse,* VI, pp. 17-18.

[20] *Ibid.,* p. 21.

can love the creature who incessantly recalls to your mind the man whom you despise and who makes you despised by the man whom you love? Yes, when death took away that nameless child, it seemed that he took away the entire past with him. . . ."[21]

Now that we have examined near at hand the details of the description of illegitimacy by Dumas *fils*, let us stand back a few paces and see what a convincing and life-like picture he has given us. We see these children, innocent of any wrong-doing, denied the rights of other children by a law which, permitting their abandonment and failing to safeguard their future, completely exonerates their fathers, whose only obligation is to provide food for them on condition that paternity is proved. If they are fortunate enough to arrive at manhood or womanhood, if their desolate lives receive the first rays of sunshine in the prospect of marriage, the parents of their loved ones refuse their consent on account of the prejudices of a narrow-minded society. Often receiving curses instead of love from their mothers, they are, if they belong to the weaker sex, forced to suicide or prostitution. Dumas had, in the case of other social problems which he discussed in his prefaces and in his plays, called for remedial legislation, and in this great problem which is a natural outcome of the others, he makes a similar appeal.

It is difficult to measure the extent to which Dumas directly succeeded in obtaining reformation of the laws governing illegitimacy. There seems to be little real doubt, however, that his plays had much to do in crystalizing public opinion, so that his contemporaries were brought to the realization that Article 340 caused great injustice and left the question open to unusual complexities. Only one year after his death, the rights of inheritance of illegitimate children were somewhat increased. A decade later, two laws, one of July 2, 1907, and another of November 7, 1907, permitted the *enfant naturel* to receive the name of whichever of his parents first recognized him legally; gave that parent the exercise of the *puissance paternelle;* made provision for the guardianship of an *enfant naturel*, whether recognized or not; and arranged for the recognition of *enfants adultérins* in certain cases, placing them on a par with *enfants naturels*. In 1912, a law was finally passed which

[21] *Femme de Claude*, Act II, sc. 2, 295.

abrogated Article 340, so that the *recherche de la paternité*, for which Dumas so often pleaded, became a reality. Since that date, court decisions have repeatedly tended toward equalization of the rights of illegitimate children and those of legitimate ones.[22]

[22] The reader will find a brief, but ample summary, of the legal aspect of the question, together with its treatment in recent French novels, in a chapter entitled *The Illegitimate Child*, in *The Defense of the Child by French Novelists*, by Clifford Stetson Parker, Ph.D., George Banta Publishing Co., Menasha, Wisconsin, 1925, pp. 18-32.

CHAPTER XV

THE INFLUENCE OF DUMAS *FILS*

TO undertake to trace the influence of Dumas *fils* upon his followers would be a task of considerable proportions. One would have to possess a more than ordinary knowledge of the development of social problems in addition to a thorough knowledge of the French drama since the Franco-Prussian War. It would, however, be unjust to the memory of Dumas *fils* completely to ignore the matter by failing to note at least the most obvious instances in which this influence has manifested itself.

That Dumas *fils* was a great philosopher, or a great moralist who had but to raise his voice in order to effect immediate and radical social reform, is certainly not our claim. That he did, however, clear a field strewn with many prejudices and obstacles, and that he accomplished a work of no small importance in preparing the public mind for the acceptance of new legislation, is a statement that admits no denial. Nor must we feel too greatly concerned in observing that his plays containing social problems no longer succeed in bringing audiences to the theater; for their very success as works of social propaganda would of itself preclude their revival in future generations. The public of to-day, which goes to the theater to seek diversion and amusement, cares little for a review of the sufferings which confronted its predecessors, particularly when it realizes that such conditions no longer exist. Those plays, then, in which social problems were stressed without sufficient character portrayal or very strong dramatic content to make them live in spite of their theme, were doomed to short life. On the other hand, they still offer to the student of the history of social problems a very interesting study; and the reader who wishes to have a proper conception of the life and thought of the Second Empire in France can hardly afford to neglect the plays of Dumas *fils*.

As we survey the field of dramatic literature from the time of Dumas *fils* until the present day, we find very definite traces of his ideas and of his methods. It is no secret that Henri Becque

could not tolerate the *pièce à thèse* which is so characteristic of the work of Dumas, nor did he care for the intricacies of dramatic action which the thesis often demanded. Yet, one cannot read *L'Enlèvement*, which deals with the divorce question, without feeling convinced that Becque has some slight debt to his predecessor.

In the work of François de Curel, the influence of Dumas is more readily apparent. The inexorable logic with which the character of Julie is sketched in *L'Envers d'une sainte*, is more than faintly reminiscent of Dumas *fils*. In *Le Repas du lion*, the Dumasian quality of which is striking, we notice the moralistic development of a social problem, the struggle between labor and capital. Here, too, we have long tirades upon the central theme which are uttered by the principal character, Jean de Miremont. The symbolistic element, characteristic of some of the plays of Dumas *fils*, emerges at the end of the play when workmen set fire to the woodland which Jean has vainly attempted to preserve against the rapacious, devouring advance of industrial interests. This symbolical treatment, lightly suggested in *Le Repas du lion*, is even more evident in *La nouvelle Idole*, in which Dr. Donnat comes to a tragic end through his blind devotion to his idol, medical science. It is also interesting to observe that the complete edition of his works which M. Curel has been publishing through G. Crès and Company, contains a system of lengthy prefaces conspicuously similar to those of Dumas *fils*.

In Paul Hervieu, the influence of Dumas is even more apparent. In this connection, Albert-Émile Sorel remarks: "M. Paul Hervieu would not have been able, perhaps, to produce the type of drama which he did, if Dumas *fils* had not accustomed the public to certain dramatic forms. . . . Alexandre Dumas *fils*, whose talent it has become customary to underrate to-day, is none the less the precursor of our contemporaries. . . . M. Paul Hervieu has taken up the social question at the point at which Dumas *fils* left it."[1]

By its theme, Hervieu's *La Loi de l'homme* is similar to *La Princesse Georges*. Just as Séverine found herself unable to obtain a divorce from her husband although she knew that Sylvanie was his mistress, so the wife in *La Loi de l'homme* is unable, through

[1] Albert-Émile Sorel: *Essais de psychologie dramatique*, p. 58.

the laws made by man, to free herself from the husband who has deceived her. The two situations can hardly be compared beyond this point; for modification in the laws since the time of Dumas had necessitated different situations in the play of Hervieu. The more recent play, however, well illustrates M. Sorel's remark that Hervieu took up the social question at the point at which Dumas left it.

In Paul Hervieu are reflected both the virtues and the shortcomings of Dumas *fils*. Hervieu has the same tendency to choose an abstract background, the same inexorable, mathematical progression toward a dénouement, and the same explicit development of a thesis through the mouthpiece of a *raisonneur*. The *raisonneur* is exceptionally conspicuous in *La Course du flambeau*. Hervieu constructs this play upon the hypothesis that a woman torn between duty toward her mother on the one hand, and her child on the other, will look toward the future rather than toward the past, and will act in the interest of the younger generation. Maravon, the *raisonneur*, delivers the following speech which bears all the earmarks of a monologue from a thesis-play of Dumas:

> Doubtless you have never heard of the *lampadophoroi?* Let me explain to you what they were. For this solemnity, the citizens of Athens would station themselves at intervals, forming a sort of chain. The first one would light a torch at the altar, would run and hand it to a second, who would carry it to a third, and so, from hand to hand, each participant would run, without looking behind, having for his sole purpose to preserve the flame which he was, however, going to pass on immediately to another. And then, having stopped, empty-handed, seeing the flight of the sacred light far in the distance, he would still accompany it with his glance, with all his powerless anxiety, with all his superfluous prayers. People have recognized in this *Course du flambeau* the very image of the generations of life.[2]

The statement made by René Doumic that the characters of Dumas *fils* are walking arguments might be applied equally well, if not more aptly, to the characters of Hervieu, particularly in *La Course du flambeau*. In this play, the author is so preoccupied with developing his thesis that he lends to Mme Fontenais, to Sabine Revel,

[2] Act I, sc. 11.

and to Marie-Jeanne, equal argumentative talents, although the three women represent three different generations.

The most significant contemporary exponent of the thesis-play is Eugène Brieux. Retaining the conception of the "useful theater" announced by Dumas *fils*, Brieux attempts, however, to give greater relief to his characters in order that the thesis may not interfere with interest in the plot. In a recent interview for the *Gaulois*, Brieux remarked to M. Raoul Viterbo: "The mission of the dramatist is precisely to make ideas *live* and to give to the actors a striking likeness to life and a scenic relief. But of course the dominating idea of the author must spread itself like an invisible fabric which does not hinder the interest of the plot. The public will be interested in the play only if the characters are of flesh and blood."

Les Avariés is an example of the useful play; but, in it, Brieux did not succeed in giving striking likeness to life to his characters. It is a play in which the same type of lecture is delivered as by one of Dumas' *raisonneurs;* but dramatic action is lacking and the interest of the audience is purely in the subject-matter and not in the dramatic opposition of forces. Here, Brieux shows himself less of an artist than Dumas who, even in his most extreme argumentation, sustained his play with clash of character or swift movement. Brieux also lacks the wit of Dumas which the latter found very valuable in relieving his long tirades. But, in general, Brieux outstrips Dumas in the breadth of his picture. However complete we may be willing to consider Dumas' picture of society, it remains, as we have stated before, the depiction of a restricted society. Professor Smith states that both the Parisian gay society of Dumas *fils* and the comfortable bourgeoisie of Augier "are toward the peak in the pyramid made up by the social strata of the French people. Brieux's slice of life is cut from the base of the pyramid, from the stratum of the common people, and is immensely broader."[3]

In spite of these differences, the dramas of these two men have much in common. In the work of Brieux, *La Question d'argent* reappears in modified form in *L'Armature;* the murder of a disloyal wife by her husband, already treated by Dumas in *La Femme*

[3] Hugh A. Smith: *Main Currents of Modern French Drama*, p. 220.

de Claude, forms a pivotal point in *Simone*. Social problems, so prominent in the plays of Dumas *fils*, are constant preoccupations of Brieux. In *La Robe rouge*, we have an indictment of the law courts; in *L'Évasion* and in *Les Avariés*, the questions of environment and heredity; in *Maternité*, the problem of birth control. But what is perhaps the most striking similarity between Dumas *fils* and Brieux is their frank, honest, sincere, robust, bourgeois attitude of humanitarian betterment of contemporary society through plays which endeavor to disclose the truth with no attempt to avoid responsibility.

It is not our purpose to solicit for Dumas *fils* a position in literature which is not rightfully his. To claim for the dramatist elements of genius which he did not possess would deceive few and would justly invite the ridicule of many. To apologize submissively, on the other hand, for a man of Dumas' talent, would not only be a tacit admission of lack of critical sense, but also an injustice to the dramatist. An *enfant naturel*, a man who by sheer strength of will and conviction, by persevering energy and hard work, succeeded in drawing crowds to the theaters in which his plays were produced, he received a chair among the forty immortals of the French Academy in 1874. The fact that every volume dealing with the French drama in recent years contains many references to Dumas *fils*, and that his name is to be found on many different pages in histories of French literature, used in connection with the names of other writers in the same volume, is ample testimony that he is a very vital figure in nineteenth-century letters. We have thus attempted to be impartial, indicating frankly the deficiencies of Dumas *fils* as well as his virtues; and if we have erred in either direction, we have defeated our own purpose of presenting a true picture of the work of the dramatist.

Hippolyte Parigot wrote concerning Dumas *fils:* "Never did a dramatic writer do more deliberately what he wanted to do, nor know better what he was doing."[4] We trust that our study of Dumas *fils* has made evident the truth of this statement. If our treatment of the dramatist has been properly presented, the reader will be convinced that the fundamental purpose of Dumas *fils* was to give a clear and convincing expression to his ideas, and

[4] Parigot: *Le Théâtre d'hier*, p. 125.

that the instances in which he failed to carry his point were few. M. Parigot has also made the following assertion: "If M. Alexandre Dumas *fils* has one merit, it is of resembling no one else. He does not copy from others; he is himself."[5] We close this study of one of the most interesting of the world's dramatists in the hope that, in addition to other features of our investigations, we have added something to the existing general conception of Dumas the dramatist and have made even more evident the force of his originality.

[5] Parigot, *Le Théâtre d'hier*, p. 241.

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